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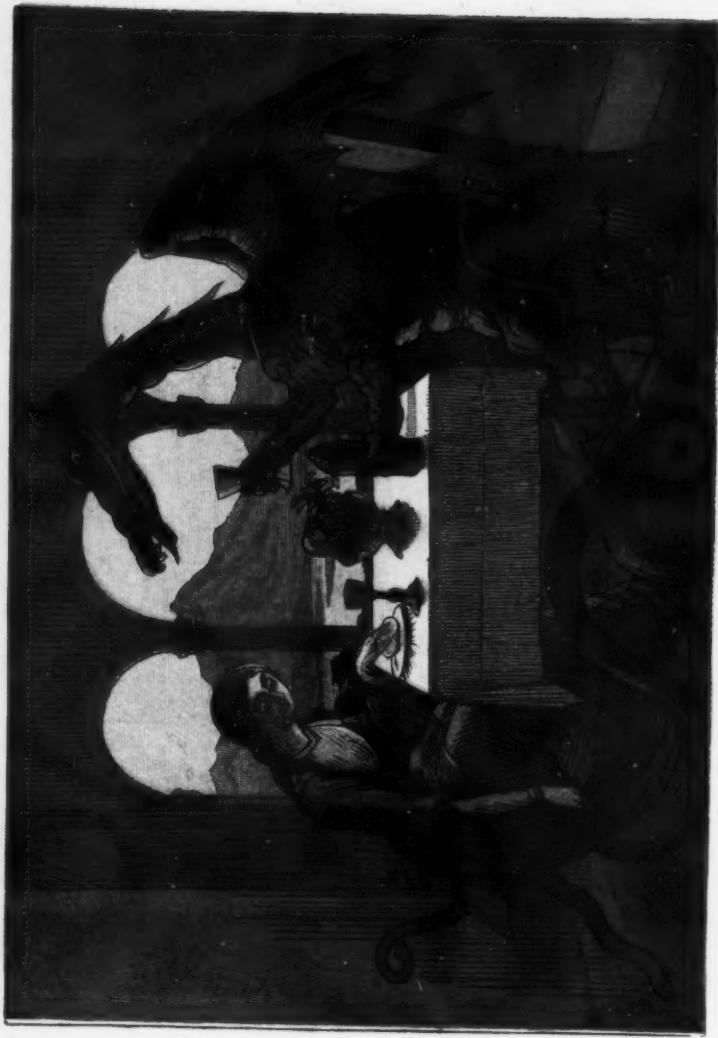
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LONGMAN'S MAGAZINE.

Christmas Number.

Beauty and the Beast.

THE seeds of flowers from isle to isle
The birds have brought, the winds have blown ;
The faces of our daisies smile
In meadows of the lands unknown ;
And tales our fathers told erewhile
Like flowers through all the world are sown.

The Lover strange, the Lady's woe,
The Prince enchanted and released—
The tale 'neath Himalayan snow
Was chanted by the Vedic priest,¹
And little Kaffir children know
Their Kaffir Beauty and the Beast.

And here, for English children, here
By him who best knew Fairyland,
Are drawn the gentle Beauty dear
And (changed by the Enchanter's wand)
The Beast, unbending o'er his beer,
His tail caressed by Beauty's hand.

¹ Urvasi and Pururavas are the persons in the Vedic version of *Beauty and the Beast*. The Kaffir version is in Callaway's *Tales from the Amazulu*.

Ah, maidens, mark the moral old :
From ugliness you need not wince,
Nor turn a cruel face and cold
On men who 're not Apollos, since
Plain lovers *may* have hearts of gold,
The Husband prove the Fairy Prince.

A. LANG.

*Two Robbers :**A LEGEND.*

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'REATA,' 'BEGGAR MY NEIGHBOUR,' &c. &c.

CHAPTER I.

THE ROBBERS AT HOME.

THEY had a merry time of it up yonder in the grand old mountains. Where the air is purest, where the flowers grow brightest, and the pinewoods are most fragrant, had the freebooters pitched their camp. No incarcerating walls confined their movements; their ceiling was the blue vault of heaven, their perfumes the wild thyme and the sweet marjoram, their music the roar of the waterfall.

The mountain-top is the only fit place for a free man to dwell. Those who choose to grovel below in the valley, tilling the ground at the sweat of their brow, deserve not that name. Whatever be their actual wealth, they are but beggars in reality, blind, infatuated, self-made beggars, who in their inconceivable folly prefer to pass their life within dungeon walls, when they might be revelling in the golden sunshine aloft.

And when perchance the wind howled, and the mountain was wrapped in clouds, and the forest swayed to and fro with the violence of the storm, was there not the mighty cavern to retire into, where, around a roaring fire, they pledged each other in horns brimming over with fiery spirits, and where amid warlike songs and stirring tales the long winter nights seemed short?

Many a hair-breadth escape and many a daring exploit would there be related of the bold Heino, their captain, and themselves, his merry men; of the raids they had made into the valleys and plains below, in search of victuals; for these noble beings were sometimes forced to descend to the grovelling world they despised, and to carry off the oxen and the corn from their baser fellow-creatures, since the produce of the forest was by no

means sufficient to satisfy the healthy appetites engendered by the aromatic mountain breezes.

Stories were told of the villages they had set alight, of the cellars they had emptied, of the altars they had stripped, and of a hundred other such merry pranks they had played. They told likewise of the senseless fear of the ignorant peasantry whenever Black Heino was mentioned ; how they would sign themselves with the cross, and fly, as from the spirit of evil himself. Cowardly fools ! Why, they might have known that Black Heino and his band were gentlemen, every one of them, to the heart's core, and that each of them would sooner die than do an ill-natured turn to any living soul !

What if they had sent old Baron Prügelstock to swim in the lake with a stone round his neck ? Had he not richly deserved it for beating three wives to death in succession ? And when they had nailed Hunchback Eisenbuckel, the hard-hearted seneschal of Castle Hohenfelz, to the granary door, like a piece of foul carrion as he was, were not scores of poor vassals the better for it ?

As for stealing, that was a thing they never would have stooped to do ; they only exercised their rights as free men, for they knew that the Creator did not cause the earth to send forth succulent fruits only for a few pampered individuals ; and when they relieved a church or monastery of some of its most inconveniently heavy gold ornaments, no sort of disrespect was meant, for they wisely judged that masses read in sackcloth robes, and held within bare walls, may be as pleasing to heaven as when offered in richly embroidered vestments.

And the old mountain used to re-echo again to its very bowels with the laughter caused by such mirthful reminiscences. Oh, these were rare good times, merry times, rollicking, frolicking times indeed !

‘ Say, whither shall we direct our next expedition ?—our larders are well-nigh empty,’ was the question mooted one evening in early spring, as Black Heino and his bold comrades were assembled together over their evening meal.

They were grouped, in various attitudes of picturesque ease, round the usual camp-fire, which had been allowed to sink rather low, for the weather was mild, and the air, even up here, was soft and balmy. The pearly-grey wood ashes lay undisturbed, save when the gentle breath of the evening wind as it swept across the mountain fanned them back to an occasional glow.

A vista of wooded hills was here unrolled before the eye—a surging sea of pine-clad heights, now looming purple in the twilight, and broken here and there by some group of massive boulder stones, or by the projecting turret of some distant castle. Down in the deep valleys, now wholly in shade, the slender spire of some village church sometimes looked out from the flowery orchards which surrounded it.

‘Let us see !’ said Rinaldo, one of the oldest and fiercest-looking of the band, rising to his feet and casting a glance at the view before him, ‘we have cleared out Schwanenthal pretty well lately, and ‘tis but a year since we last pillaged Wolkenstein. Poor fellows, it would not be fair were we not to give them time to get up their stocks again before paying them another visit. There is no use either in trying the fortress of Rothenfels, for the cowards are afraid of us, and have the walls well guarded ; neither is it worth our while to look in at the Abbey of St. Christopher ; the Abbot is a niggardly old man and will assuredly not go to heaven when he dies, for I hear that he has not yet replaced the gold ornaments we borrowed the year before last. No ; we must look further this time for the replenishing of our larder. What says our chieftain ? What say you, brave fellows, to a march across the hills to proud Castle Taubenheim ? It is many a year since it has been disturbed, and ‘tis said there are festive preparations on foot. At such times warders are apt to be lax, and gates are sometimes left open.’

‘To Castle Taubenheim,’ said Black Heino reflectively ; ‘yes, the plan is none so bad. I have always heard that there be plenty of fat oxen and snowy flocks, barrels of wine and sacks of gold, in short a goodly harvest for bold hearts and strong arms. Plenty golden chains and such furbelows, too, for our sweethearts. Tell me, my pretty Sibylla,’ he continued, carelessly stroking the jetty curls of a beautiful gipsy girl who reclined at his feet, ‘what shall it be this time ? Those proud German dames have no lack of such sparkling gear, and methinks a ruby necklace or a pair of sparkling earrings would become thee right well. The moon is now at the full, and will assist our march ; therefore to Castle Taubenheim let it be !’

The proposition found a ready echo among the followers, and ‘To Castle Taubenheim ! to Castle Taubenheim !’ was echoed all around.

CHAPTER II.

KUNO'S BRIDE.

In the Castle of Taubenheim there were indeed preparations for feasting and carousing being made on a large scale. Oxen were getting roasted whole ; pigs and peacocks alike were being pressed into the service, cheeses larger than millstones stood piled around, along with dishes of honeycomb, bunches of sausages, and the many other ingredients required for the concoction of the light and wholesome *menu* of a 'wassail supper' of those days.

And the beverages were being dealt out in like generous fashion. Large hogsheads of ale, wine, and mead stood ready tapped, and would presently be poured into the long rows of silver tankards ranged upon the oaken buffets.

The great hall had been garnished and swept, and freshly strewn with the sweet-scented rushes brought hither in cartloads by the vassals ; and Dame Kunigunde, the housekeeper, had been busy at work for many days past, directing her maidens to dust and to sweep, to remove every unsightly cobweb from the heavy tapestry hangings, and scour each silver plate and goblet till it shone again, and she nodded approvingly at the reflection therein of an old woman with a yellow parchment face, and a high starched cambric cap. Garlands of spring flowers were being entwined by the younger maidens, wherewith to decorate the large painted shield with the arms of the Taubenhorst family, a pair of pigeons proper on a field azure.

And all these doings were in honour of Damsel Irmengard, the niece of Ritter Stillfried, the lord of the castle, for she was to-morrow to complete her sixteenth year.

And she was worthy of all the trouble they took, for Irmengard was the sweetest and fairest maiden for many miles around, and there were no lack of gallant gentlemen who would gladly have sued for her love, but that it was well known that old Ritter Stillfried did not intend that this dainty flower should be transplanted from his garden. He was a prudent man and a wise one, old Knight Stillfried, though none of the bravest, and he rightly judged that it would be a pity to let such a neat slice of fortune go out of the family. Therefore, when his gallant brother Herebord, dying of his wounds received in battle, had said to him

with his last breath, 'Brother Stillfried, be a father to my orphan daughter,' he had, after rapidly reviewing the situation and remembering that his own son Kuno was just four years older than the little Irmengard, answered—

'Brother Herebord, I will; my home shall be her home always.'

And now the time had come when this latent wish could be fulfilled; the little Irmengard having budded into a beautiful maiden, and the boy Kuno into a handsome youth of well-nigh twenty years, with the flaxen down just beginning to show on his upper lip.

Though his limbs were straight, and his features regular, yet Kuno Taubenthal did not come up to the chivalrous standard of those days, for his hand was delicate as a maiden's and his face over-white for a younger; his fair brow was often drawn together in a frown of discontent, and his large blue eyes, just such another pair as those of his cousin Irmengard, should not have looked thus gloomily into the world.

Ritter Stillfried had given his son a very careful education. He had not cared to let him take part in tournaments and joustings and other such rough amusements of the age, and when the young Kuno had petitioned for leave to hunt the wild boar or track the wolf, he would tell his son that these were dangerous pastimes, and that there were plenty retainers there to take the risks of hunting off his hands, while reading the missal or translating the old chronicles was a safer and more profitable occupation.

For the worthy knight's own experience was all against the handling of weapons. In his own youth he had joined one of the crusading expeditions, as every well-born gentleman was expected to do, but he came back very soon from the Holy Land on sick leave, as he had found that warfare greatly to disagree with his constitution. As he enumerated them at great length to the family physician, the symptoms of the disease which had befallen him in Palestine were strange and distressing exceedingly. How a sudden and violent palpitation of heart had seized him at the very first sounding of the war-trumpet; how the whizzing noise of each Paynim arrow as it passed him through the air caused his knees to shake and tremble in an inexplicable manner, and how he had swooned away at the sight of the first comrade who had fallen from his charger bathed in gore.

And the learned physician, after musing upon this singular

case, had advised the Ritter Stillfried to give up warfare—to take a wife, and to restore his constitution with good old ale and generous wine, all of which recipes were followed out conscientiously by the gallant knight; and he rewarded the learned physician for his intelligent and able advice with a heavy purseful of golden ducats.

Young Kuno was, therefore, brought up in accordance with these ideas. The care of his education had been delegated to Pater Nepomuk, the castle chaplain, who had been instructed to stifle in the bud any unwholesome hankerings after life-endangering pursuits.

To all outward appearance this system was successful, for, as was said before, in his twentieth year Kuno Taubenhorst rather resembled a delicate maiden than a spirited youth. His white hand had never wielded a cross-bow or a dagger, his foot but seldom touched a stirrup.

Only sometimes, when alone bending over a learned task, some latent spark of manhood would stir his sluggish blood, and he would cast his pen to the ground and tear the crackling parchment with feverish fingers, and at such moments his blue eyes would shoot angry sparks, and he would grind his white teeth and mutter savagely—

‘Is my life always to be like this, I wonder? Are my hands good for nothing but for tracing crooked characters on yon vile yellow sheepskin? Are my eyes never to see aught but these sad grey walls and the wearisome book-shelves?’

But these outbreaks of rebellious irritation were counterbalanced by other moments which were more agreeable, for there are two sides to every question; and often so of late, when the old Knight Stillfried, after emptying an extra glass of the potent wine which was so necessary for strengthening his constitution, would clap his son on the shoulder, and say, winking towards the end of the room, where the pretty Irmengard sat bending over her embroidery frame—

‘What say you, Kuno? Your cousin grows apace, and will be a fair maiden. A pretty lass and a pretty dowry are not things to be despised when they grow to your hand. What say you? Ha! ha! ha!’

Only at moments like these did it seem to young Kuno that life in the old castle need not always be dull and gloomy, and that there was one fair reason at all events for making his lot endurable.

The maiden herself had not been formally consulted on the point, for what well-bred German damsel would ever pronounce the words love or marriage until actually standing at the altar? But you may be sure that she was no less sharp-sighted than are young ladies in our days, and that, as she demurely watched the preparations for the morrow's festivities, she understood right well the reason of all this extra pomp and grandeur, and knew that her birthday was to be likewise the feast of her betrothal.

CHAPTER III.

FINDING THE GOLD.

THE castle of Taubenheim stood at the foot of a high granite cliff, the summit of which was crowned with straggling pine trees, whose stretching branches made horizontal streaks against the blue sky above. If the castle warder had not been so engrossed in testing the quality of the freshly tapped mead that evening, he might have noticed that about sunset there were other outlines to be seen up there besides the black stone pines.

For Heino and his brave companions were all assembled on the heights. They peered down over the cliff, and took note of the drawbridges and outside flights of steps, and organised their plan of approach accordingly; then, stretching out their limbs on the fine green sward, they lay down to rest, awaiting the hour when it would be advisable to descend.

Midnight had already been tolled out from the castle tower, when Black Heino arose and gave his orders. Each man had his task assigned to him. A certain number were to overpower the male inhabitants and render them helpless. 'They are no doubt all of them more than half intoxicated by this time, so it will be an easy matter. You, Hubert and Roland, along with the younger lads, will guard the entrance to ensure us against surprise from without. There is no need to kill anyone if they give themselves up with a good grace, but gag the womankind if they attempt any of their cursed shrieking. When we have filled our bags, we can then enliven the scene with a little bonfire.'

Silently they crept down the cliff, each man letting himself drop from ledge to ledge with the agility of a chamois, clutching at the stunted brushwood for support, never missing their hold

nor slipping a foot, till all stood assembled at the base of the rock. Cautiously they stole past the Gothic chapel, whose arched windows and mulioned pillars were shining white in the moonlight. Some of the robbers peered in through the coloured windows at the gilded altar and richly decked shrines within, but their chieftain said—

‘No, no, the castle first; we can perform our devotions on our way back.’

They stepped lightly over the marble tombs where slept many generations of the family of Taubenhorst, stalwart knights whose stone images thus seen in the moonlight seemed to threaten these intruders with their lifeless arms.

But Heino and his merry men paid no heed to these fossil spectres. They were not afraid of living men, far less of dead ones.

Nothing occurred to disturb their well-laid plans. The drawbridge was passed, the walls scaled, and the drunken warders speedily disarmed. Most of the guests still carousing in the vast banqueting-hall were likewise too far gone to offer any resistance. Only young Kuno fought like a madman, but after a desperate struggle was overpowered and bound fast. One of the robbers was about to finish him off with his poniard, when Black Heino, catching sight of the smooth-faced, blue-eyed stripling, bade him desist.

‘See, he is but a boy. Let him be securely locked up, but do him no injury.’

‘I am not a boy.’ And Kuno ground his teeth in helpless rage. ‘I am as good a man as any of you fellows, and would prove it to you had I but the chance.’

‘See, see, a pretty spirit for so young a lad,’ said Heino, laughing, as he turned the lock behind him.

The old Knight Stillfried himself, paralysed by fear, had no need of being bound or locked up, for he trembled so sorely that he could not leave his chair. With quavering voice and in faltering accents he begged for mercy, and himself pointed out the place where his gold bags were stowed away.

‘Good master robber,’ he said to the tall and formidable chieftain, who was standing over him in a threatening attitude, ‘I pray you deal not harshly with me. Everything you may take, and welcome, only spare my life. The gold, it is in the west turret yonder, the first staircase to the right. Stay, I will myself

show you the way ;' but his trembling limbs refused to bear him, and he sank back helplessly. The poor old knight had not felt so ill since he had left the Holy Land.

' I shall find it myself,' said Heino, with a glance of contempt at the shaking Stillfried. ' But woe to you, old man, if you have deceived me ! You shall die the death of a dog ! ' And he turned and went up the vaulted corridor alone, leaving his men below intent on refreshing themselves with the good cheer that remained on the festive board.

He went up the staircase as directed, taking the gigantic steps two at a time in his hurry to accomplish this part of the night's business. A glance through the narrow gullet window at the landscape below had shown him that the night was far advanced already, and, although the moon was mistress of the sky as yet, he knew they must be far on their way ere sunrise with the booty ; for who could tell when succour might not arrive from some of the neighbouring castles ?

It may have been this very haste which caused the robber chieftain to mistake the directions given, or perhaps the old knight, in his senile terror, had failed to speak very distinctly. Certain it is that Heino turned to the left instead of the right, and pursued his way up a second and narrower winding staircase. The flight came to an end before a small arched doorway.

' Here, then, old Stillfried keeps his gold,' he said to himself ; and he gave a good push to the oaken door, prepared to force it by strength had it proved obstinate, but, somewhat to his surprise, it yielded to the first touch, and flew back noiselessly.

Black Heino stood rooted to the threshold, bewildered at the treasures which met his sight.

Gold ! Gold ! Gold ! Yes, there was plenty of gold in here ; gold such as Heino had never in his life seen before ; gold which shone, and glittered, and sparkled in a way which intoxicated him with its brilliancy. Gold and silver, silver and gold, the whole room was full of them, strewn lavishly about. No wonder that Heino stood absorbed in the contemplation of such riches.

The robber chieftain was generous and open-handed, and was not wont to claim the lion's share for himself. Whatever booty was carried off, was divided fairly among his comrades ; he had even shown himself careless about taking his due, and set no store on gold or precious stones.

But now, for the first time, he had seen a treasure which he

would fain have kept all to himself. Not a coin of that glittering gold could he bear to see in another man's hand.

Hungrily, greedily, avariciously, he now gazed at the treasure before him, at the beautiful girl with the golden hair, who lay there, sleeping in a frame of silver moonlight.

She lay thus plunged in the innocent slumber of early youth. The noise and turmoil of the robbers' overfall, the clank of arms, and the cries of distress, had not been sufficient to arouse her, or, if vaguely overheard, midst her dream, she had taken it forsooth for the continuation of that noisy revelry from which she had early retired.

Black Heino had seen many women and beautiful women before, and such had not been coy with their favours towards him; yet, as he now stood and gazed at this moonlight vision, he felt as if he had never seen a woman ere this. The sleeping maiden before him was a revelation of something he had never dreamt of till now—a revelation of womanliness, of innocence, of purity.

That gentle breast which rose and fell so calmly had never been agitated by fierce passions; those rose-leaf lips, half parted in slumber, could never have spoken aught but gentle tender words; that little hand so dazzling white seemed only fit to gather lilies; those eyes, now hidden 'neath their fringed lids, could only be of heaven's own blue. Those other creatures he had known had been but females, this was the first woman he had seen.

The flowing locks of aureate hair draped her all around as with a royal mantle, while one long plait of massive gold hung down and trailed on to the polished boards.

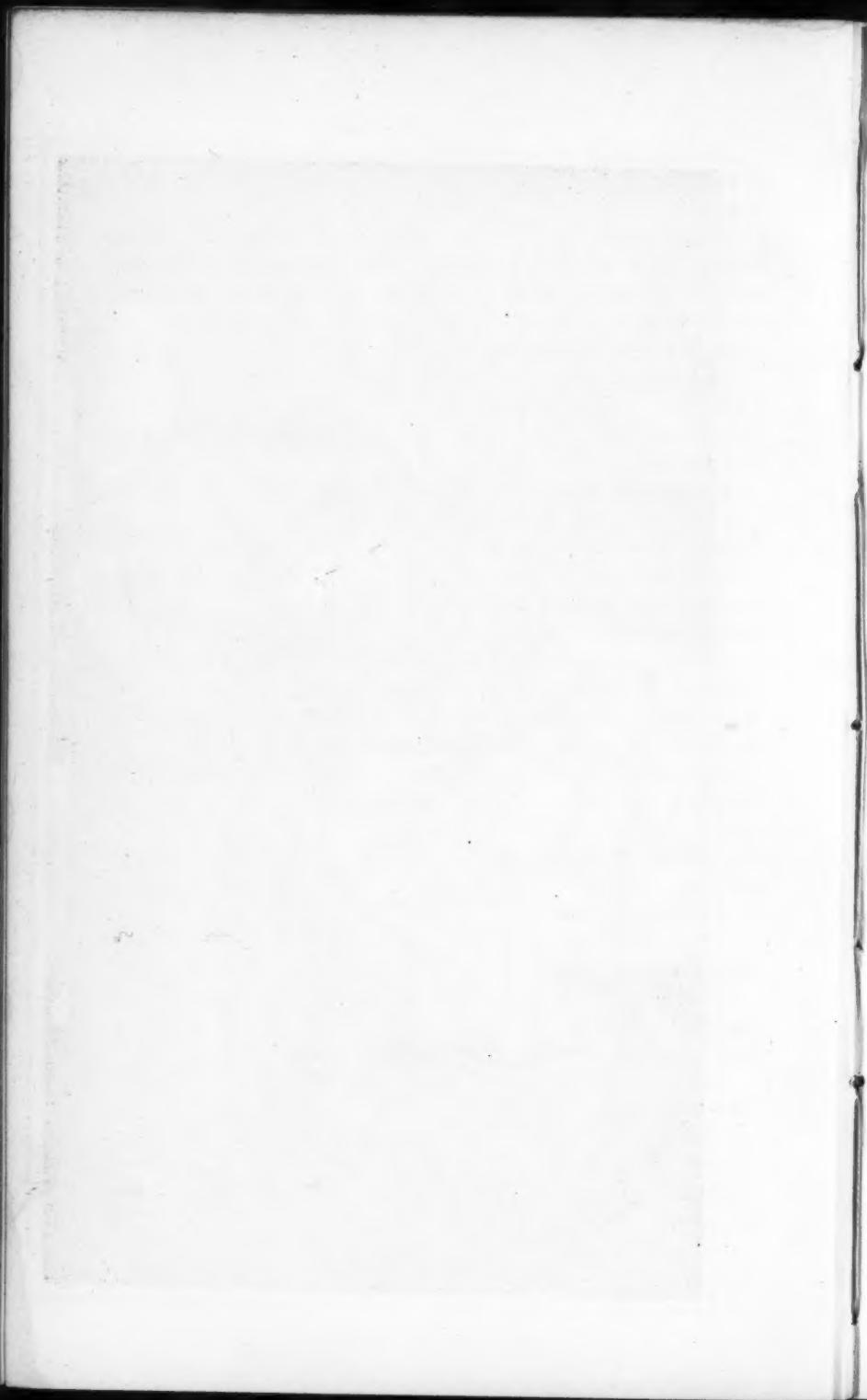
So long it was, and so heavy did it seem, that it was a marvel that by its very weight it did not drag down the slender girlish figure into the pool of silver moonlight on the floor.

The spinning-wheel, standing in one corner, had its distaff full of argentine flax, and the turtle-dove in its wicker cage had been likewise turned to the purest silver.

Black Heino, holding his breath, trembled at each distant sound which reached him up the staircase; even the silver dove in the silver cage filled him with apprehension whenever he fluttered in his sleep. What if the beautiful maiden were to wake and be scared by the sight of the robber before her?

A necklace of sparkling gems and the rich girdle she had worn at the banquet lay on a neighbouring seat; likewise a pair of long white gloves daintily embroidered with fine seed pearls. One





of the gloves had slipped on the floor, and was lying in the moon-light pool.

Black Heino had never had such a fitting opportunity of providing Sibylla with the ornaments he had promised ; but he never thought of Sibylla, and he made one step forward, and bent towards the glove lying at his feet. Carefully and reverentially he lifted it up, and pressed it to his lips.

But in stooping his scabbard had touched the oaken boards. There was a slight movement on the couch, and the damsel opened her blue eyes full upon him, as he stood there holding the glove in his hand.

But the look was not one of terror or abhorrence, such as he had been fearing. No, she looked up at him fearlessly, sweetly, confidently, and the beautiful lips parted into a ravishing smile. Then, slowly, her fringed eyelids dropped down again, and she relapsed into slumber with the gentle sigh of a happy child resuming a blissful dream.

Heino could have stood thus for ever, keeping guard over her slumbers, but a sound below aroused him from his trance ; heavy steps were coming up the staircase, and, closing the chamber door, he turned to meet his men, hurrying up in search of him.

‘ Haste thee, haste thee, noble captain, we are discovered ; there is a sound of galloping horses in the distance, we must be gone ! ’

‘ Didst thou find the gold ? ’ was asked by more than one.

‘ Plenty of gold,’ murmured Black Heino dreamily as they were leaving the castle.

‘ Then why leave it behind, noble captain ? Why not have brought it with thee ? ’

‘ I could not bring it,’ said Black Heino with a heavy sigh. ‘ It was too well guarded for that’—guarded by innocence, by purity. Such treasures were not for the like of him.

The men wondered to see their chieftain sigh so bitterly over a few sacks of gold, for such was not his wont.

‘ We can return and fetch it another time,’ suggested one of the followers, but the robber chieftain with a terrible oath drew his poniard, and swore to strike dead on the spot the first man who spoke of touching *that* gold !

CHAPTER IV.

CONVERSION.

THE memory of that birthday night whose festivities had been thus rudely disturbed lived long among the inhabitants of Castle Taubenheim. The guests had all departed in terror and quaking to their own homes, to guard against any similar visitation.

On examining the state of things next morning, the larders were found to have been plundered, and the casks had been emptied; the flower garlands and festive hangings were soiled and trampled under foot, and the silver flagons were gone, but, strange to say, the heavy gold bags had been left undisturbed.

When the old Knight Stillfried, still trembling with the shock received, had been able to ascend the turret staircase, he found to his surprise that his treasured ducats were all there intact.

‘Strange, very strange,’ he muttered to himself, feeling the gold between his fingers to make sure that it really was there. ‘And I told him the way to be sure. I do not feel quite easy in my mind, for perhaps he may come back to fetch it. I wish he had taken it with him the first time, for another such visit would kill me outright.’

Young Kuno was all for revenge, and for pursuing the robbers into their own den, but the peace-loving knight would not hear of any sort of retaliation.

‘No, no, Kuno! it would not be safe to irritate them further; we must be thankful that it was no worse, and that they have spared our lives. It is really kind of them not to have burned down the castle to the ground.’

Only pretty Irmengard had not been disturbed that night. She had slept through the noise of the overfall, and came down next morning as blooming and fresh as a May flower with the dew still on it, and with a new soft light of happiness shining in her beautiful eyes.

‘Thank God, my pretty, that you are not ill with the fright,’ said old Dame Kunigunde, who had also been her nurse. ‘And did you not hear the clank of arms, my child? nor the blood-thirsty shouts of those terrible men?’

‘Nothing of that,’ answered Irmengard. ‘I heard but the nightingale singing outside my window; I slept so softly and

sweetly as never before in my life, and oh, nurse, I had such a beautiful dream !'

'A dream, my pretty one, and what did you dream of ?'

'I dreamt that there was someone standing near my couch and taking care of me, a tall handsome man.'

'And with blue eyes and fair hair like your cousin Kuno ? 'Tis but natural for a maiden to dream of her betrothed ; there is no harm in it.'

'No, he was taller than Kuno.'

'Love ever magnifies the beloved object,' said the old woman, wisely, 'and your cousin may yet grow awhile.'

'And he had black hair, and beautiful dark eyes, that shone like two burning coals ; and he looked at me so mournfully and so wistfully. And, nurse, do you know, I have lost one of my gloves ? it was the pair with the pearl embroidery on it.'

But Dame Kunigunde could not decipher the incomprehensible dream, and though she searched diligently, high and low, for the missing glove with the pearl embroidery, it was not to be found.

And this was not extraordinary, for how could the worthy housekeeper have guessed that the dainty gauntlet was at that moment, full many a mile away, at the top of the highest mountain, lying next to the heart of the robber chieftain ?

Black Heino was sitting moodily beside the camp-fire. He had shown no interest in the division of spoil, and had answered not a word, when the dark-eyed Sibylla archly inquired for the ruby necklace or the glittering earrings he had promised her.

And when she had replenished his goblet with sparkling wine, and would have sweetened it, moreover, with a kiss from her coral lips, he had declined the kiss, but had taken the wine unsweetened. And Black Heino had shown his wisdom in so doing, for a kiss is only sweet when you value the lips which give it, but good wine is good alike in silver or in pewter tankard.

In the days and weeks that followed, Black Heino remained thus gloomy and abstracted. He was no longer the same reckless, dare-devil captain, ready for any expedition, and willing to lead his men to danger or death. As often as not he let them go on their pillaging excursions alone, and when he could evade his comrades' notice he would steal away, unobserved, in the direction of Castle Taubenheim. Concealed under various disguises, he would linger whole days round this place, with no other hope than to

see, from a distance, a slender figure walking on the terrace, or perhaps merely to espy a light burning at a turret window.

And within the castle likewise things were no longer as they used to be. Kuno was yet more peevish and moody than of yore. His countenance did not light up, even when sitting by the side of his lovely bride. And he would stand on the battlements for hours together, gazing up wistfully at the mountain heights.

Pretty Irmengard was changed as well; her cheeks had lost both colour and roundness, and she would sit whole days idle at her spinning-wheel. The day which was to make her Kuno's wife was now approaching, but she went about the preparations for her wedding-gear slowly and reluctantly, showing no more interest in her dainty garments than if she had been preparing them for the cloister walls.

One day, when visiting the hamlet on some charitable errand, she had been accosted by a ragged and dishevelled beggar, who asked an alms of her. She had given it readily, as was her wont, for she was ever tender-hearted to the poor; but why did she start and feel her heart flutter wildly as her eyes met those of the suppliant fixed longingly, hungrily upon hers?

And one evening in midsummer an aged minstrel had come to the castle gate, and begged for leave to divert the gentle folk with his lays. The leave was granted, and with tottering feet the aged harper was conducted to the hall, and seemed all but too weak to touch the chords of his instrument.

His beard was long and white, and his back was bent, but his dark eye flashed with the fire of youth, and his voice had a full and sonorous sound. He sang of the power of Love, and of how it is mighty enough to tame the fury of the wild beast, and to lure it from the forest a docile and willing captive.

And again Irmengard felt strangely moved as she listened, and it seemed to her that she had seen that aged minstrel's face before.

The robbers on the mountain were no longer satisfied with their chieftain. They were beginning to get disorganised, and different sections and parties were forming among them. They did not dare to complain aloud, for they stood in awe of their gloomy captain, but they grew discontented and grumbled behind his back, for, one and all, they felt the want of an iron hand to hold them together as hitherto.

It was Heino himself who read these thoughts in their minds, and broached the subject one day.

‘Brothers,’ he said, ‘you must choose another leader, for I can no longer be with you. The days are past when I loved this life above all others. My heart is no longer in the trade, and it has been borne in upon me that the life I have been leading is a sinful one. I no longer care to deprive innocent men of their goods, nor to burn houses and pillage churches. I am tired of bloodshed, and the sight of a burning village no longer excites me to mirth as formerly. I go from you to give myself up as prisoner.’

This resolution was received with wondering stupefaction by the band. What, bold Black Heino, the bravest of the brave, the most intrepid and reckless among them, to give up this life and turn saint in the prime of his manhood! He who had so often told them that the right of might was the only law to be recognised by free men, who had hitherto regulated his conduct upon

The good old rule—the simple plan,
That those should take who have the power,
And those should keep who can !

Had he now come to prate of sinfulness like a monkish friar? Why, their captain must be bewitched, as indeed he had seemed ever since their foray to Castle Taubenheim. Yet there was some truth in his words, that his heart was no longer in the life he was leading. No use to oppose his wish or try to keep him back. It might be only a passing fancy, but they knew enough of their leader to be aware that he was never to be dissuaded from any resolve. Let him go, since go he would. Doubtless he would return to them when the evil spell had worn off.

‘At least thou wilt drink a parting cup with us for the sake of the merry times we have seen and the lusty pranks we have played together?’

‘Be it so, my brothers,’ answered Heino. ‘We shall drink together to the memory of the past. This wine shall be the last of the ill-gotten goods I shall ever touch.’

And so, after a last wassail feast, in which they pledged each other all round, Heino rose to depart without a sigh of regret for the life he was leaving. His resolution never faltered as he grasped the hand of each comrade; not even the tears which fell

from the black eyes of the beautiful Sibylla had power to touch him, for his heart was full of another image as he bent his steps once more towards Castle Taubenheim.

CHAPTER V.

THE PENITENT ROBBER.

OLD Ritter Stillfried was sitting in his turret room, counting over his golden ducats, as he was fond of doing. He loved his money with still greater tenderness than before, when he thought of how nearly he had been losing it.

Now he was counting over those yellow ducats which were to be the wedding portion of his fair niece, and, as each glittering coin passed through his fingers, he congratulated himself anew that the pretty shining pieces were not to leave the family to swell the money-bag of another man.

So absorbed was he in his occupation that he heard not an unusual sound at the window behind him, nor marked how first a muscular hand appeared grasping the ivy which clothed this side of the castle wall, to be speedily followed by a dusky head, and how finally the figure of a tall man swung itself over the windowsill and stood in the room beside him.

It was beginning to grow dark, and old Ritter Stillfried did not look up till aroused by a touch on his shoulder, and, turning his head, he saw himself confronted by a tall dark man, whose sun-burnt face and glowing eyes were most unpleasantly familiar.

Recognition was borne in upon him instantly with the lightning-like rapidity of frenzied terror. It was the robber chieftain Black Heino, whose very name sufficed to make him tremble.

Even his cherished gold was for the moment forgotten. A nearer and dearer interest was at stake, and he trembled for his life, as he had trembled once before.

‘Good sir, worthy sir,’ he faltered at length, when his parched tongue was able to move, ‘spare my life. I am an old man, and it could do you no good. Take all this money, my niece’s fortune, take even my own, and welcome; it is yours already, and you have doubtless come back to fetch it.’

‘I want not your gold, old man,’ said Heino, in his deep bass

voice, and he waved it away with a haughty gesture. ‘Not that gold——’

‘It is all I have, I swear by the holy rood; not another coin have I got but what is contained in these bags. Take it! Oh, take it!’ And with shaking fingers he lifted the heavy coins towards his awful visitor.

‘I want not this gold, I tell you, Sir Knight,’ repeated Heino impatiently.

‘What, then, do you want, brave sir? Not my life? Only not my life?’ he shrieked in his terror. ‘Consider, good sir, worthy sir, I am but an old man, and my death could profit you nought. Take my gold, but spare my life.’

‘Fear not, old fool,’ said Black Heino, raising his voice, ‘I want neither your money nor your life. You have nothing to fear from me. See, I am alone and unarmed.’

‘Alone!’ repeated the trembling knight, with a backward glance at the window, from whence he had expected to see a train of armed men appear. But even one robber alone, whether armed or not, was quite bad enough, he thought.

‘I have come alone,’ went on the robber chieftain calmly, ‘to give myself up as your prisoner. I have renounced my comrades because I have seen the sinfulness of my pursuits, and have resolved to end my days as a devout Christian to efface the memory of the harm I have done.’

The words were humble, but the tone was hardly so, and even these contrite protestations failed to restore confidence to Ritter Stillfried’s fluttering heart. He coughed and cleared his throat, and twisted himself to and fro on his seat in mortal uneasiness, not well knowing which tack to take, and fearing to offend this fierce-looking penitent.

‘Christian sinfulness. Just so, good sir. At least, that is not what I meant to say. Far be it from me to call your trade a sinful one.’

‘I have come to give up my sinful life,’ repeated Black Heino with uncompromising distinctness. ‘And I offer myself as your prisoner.’

‘Very good, very good, just as you please,’ stammered the old knight, not knowing how to choose his words. ‘Then perhaps you would like to see the chaplain, Pater Nepomuk. Stay, good sir; do not trouble yourself to move. Shall I fetch him myself?’ And, fear lending him momentary strength, he managed to reach

the bottom of the staircase, where, after gasping out incoherent orders to have the dangerous captive securely locked up, he swooned away, exhausted by terror.

This unexpected capture of the robber chieftain was a source of considerable embarrassment to most of the inhabitants of Castle Taubenheim. What to do with him was the question which perplexed every mind.

Ritter Stillfried had in a quavering voice directed that the heaviest chains and the most massive handcuffs should be produced for the benefit of the robber chieftain, but no one felt particularly inclined to try the experiment of putting them on, and young Kuno waved away the manacles as he said :

‘ Your men once bound my hands for me, but you spared my life when they would have killed me, and though you called me a boy, I shall suffer no one to lay hands on you now. You are welcome to stay in our dull castle if it pleases you to give up your merry life up yonder, though I cannot but marvel at your taste.’

So the robber was allowed to remain at Castle Taubenheim, and was treated as a guest rather than a prisoner. In fact, it was Ritter Stillfried himself who became a prisoner in consequence, for since the advent of the terrible Black Heino he dared not leave his room, and remained there, protected by bolts and bars, while the dangerous robber was at liberty to go where he pleased.

On the day after the robber’s arrival, damsel Irmengard, when passing down the vaulted passage, suddenly caught sight of Black Heino leaning against a pillar.

She gave a scream, and looked as though she would swoon away, but recovered herself as quickly when she was told that the terrible freebooter should be sent to the dungeons.

‘ Oh ! not to the dungeons,’ she said, with tears of pity standing in her sweet eyes. ‘ Not on my account ; it was only a passing faintness :’ but she felt quite well and strong again, she declared, strong enough even to sit at the same board with this unwonted guest.

And more than this, the fair Irmengard took a surprising interest in the conversion of this reclaimed robber. She would spend hours in reading to him from the works of the holy Fathers, and it was stranger yet that in this pious occupation her cheek should regain its lost bloom and her eye its former brightness.

CHAPTER VI.

PERVERSION.

A FEW days before the one fixed for the marriage of Irmengard and Kuno, the youthful bridegroom was walking at eventide in one of the forest glades.

He was moodier than usual, and looked more like a man who is to be hanged to-morrow than like the accepted suitor of the fairest maiden in the country.

Presently he was accosted by several strange-looking men with slouched hats and shrouding mantles, from under which glittering weapons peeped out.

‘Young sir,’ said the foremost of them, ‘do you belong to the castle yonder? Methinks you are a page or such like. Will you bear me a message to our comrade, who is a prisoner there?’

‘A message, what is it?’ said Kuno.

‘We desire to know whether it is indeed by his own free will that he is there detained. He must ere this be weary of such a tame existence, and we are sorely in want of someone to guide us as before. Strong arms and brave hearts we have no lack of, but what we require is a head to direct, and a voice to command us. We start before long for a raid against the lowland provinces, but we are helpless without Black Heino, our bold captain. Tell him that we agree in advance to every condition he chooses to make if he will only return to us. Tell us, oh, where does he languish? If he is in a dungeon, we shall free him. If he is wearing chains, they shall be broken.’

‘Methinks he is wearing chains,’ said Kuno thoughtfully. ‘But they are forged of silken hair, and not of iron links. Look rather for yourselves, and judge whether he is likely to return to you.’

The trampling sound of horses’ hoofs was approaching, and Kuno and the group of outlaws stepped aside to screen themselves from view while peering out through the leafy branches.

Presently two figures appeared in sight, riding along the open glade, their outlines blended together against the sunset sky. The one was a damsel mounted on a milk-white palfrey. Her green velvet robe richly embroidered with gold nearly swept the

forest floor. The snowy plumes of her drooping hat cast a becoming shade over her fair brow. Her blue eyes looked up confidently at her tall companion.

This companion was no other than the robber chieftain, who, mounted on a coal-black charger and attired in chevalresque costume, looked forsooth as good a gentleman as any in the land; for the tailor was in these good old times every whit as mighty a sorcerer as he is with us to-day. To look at Black Heino as he now reined in his fiery steed, no one would have thought that he had been used to setting barns on fire and wringing their owners' necks.

As the couple rode hard by the place where young Kuno and the robbers lay concealed, Black Heino bent down and seized the damsel's little hand. She made no sign of resistance as he pressed it long and fervently to his lips.

‘A woman!’ said Rinaldo in a tone of the deepest disgust. ‘So it is a woman who keeps him here! Times are changed indeed. Our light-hearted captain, who never cared for a wench more than a week at a time, to have fallen so low as this!’

‘If such is the case,’ put in a second robber, ‘then our errand is hopeless indeed. Heino is no longer the leader we require. We must look for another.’

‘He is found already!’ cried the youth impulsively. ‘I am your leader.’

‘You our leader!’ cried the robbers unanimously with a laugh of derision. ‘Young sir, you are pleased to bandy jokes with us. A milk-faced stripling like you! Your silken doublet becomes you right bravely no doubt, but it would be rent on our harsh briars. Your little hand is tender as yonder maiden’s, and your rosy lips are but fit to lisp soft words.’

‘My skin may be white,’ cried Kuno in growing excitement. ‘But my blood is red! though my doublet be silken, a man’s heart beats beneath it. My rosy lips will know to command you right well, and my little hand to punish whoever dares to disobey.’

His youthful face aglow with a light almost of inspiration, his blue eyes shining like sapphires that have caught fire, young Kuno’s impassioned words took his audience by storm.

They embraced his knees, they kissed his hand, they shouted aloud in their enthusiasm, ‘Long live our youthful leader! We

shall follow him to the death ! ' And, raising him on their shoulders, they bore him away in triumph to their mountain fastness.

CHAPTER VII.

HEINO'S BRIDE.

BY-AND-BY even old Stillfried began to grow accustomed to the presence of his singular guest, when he saw how even a weak maiden could approach him without danger; so he ventured gradually out of his self-imposed prison, though he never felt quite safe unless there were the length of the board between him and his visitor, and he started nervously whenever Black Heino entered the room.

The search for young Kuno had been given up by this time, and it was taken for granted that he must have fallen into the river or have been torn to pieces by the wild beasts of the forest, as he was reported to have been last seen bending his steps in that direction.

The fair Irmengard bewailed her cousin as a brother and a playmate, but she did not wring her hands nor tear her hair, as maidens are wont to do when they have lost their lovers, neither did she talk of shutting herself up in a convent.

It was a great blow to the old knight when one day, about six months after Kuno's disappearance, Black Heino came to him and said :—

‘ Ritter Stillfried, I have come to ask you to give me the hand of your niece in marriage.’

What was he to do ? Had ever gentleman been in like predicament before ? Give the hand of his niece, and with it her fortune, to this man, a common robber ! It was not to be thought of ! But, on the other hand, how dare he refuse ? The enamoured suitor would assuredly burn down the castle and cut all their throats if balked in his desire ! And the most singular point of the matter was that the maiden herself made no objection to the arrangement, but with becoming blushes modestly confessed that her heart had long been given to the robber chieftain, and that she would never be another man's wife.

‘ But she was to have been Kuno's wife,’ sighed the old knight, helplessly, for it cost him a pang to relinquish his long-

cherished plan ; but Heino reminded him that Kuno was very probably dead, in which case he did not require a wife, or else he had gone off of his own free will, and by so doing had naturally forfeited his claim to the fair Irmengard.

All these arguments bewildered the old knight exceedingly, and confused his notion of right and wrong. Hitherto he had always believed that robbers and gentlemen were two separate classes of beings who could never be confused, but now the line of demarcation appeared less distinct. After weighing the matter from almost every possible point of view, the balance was finally turned in Black Heino's favour when it occurred to old Stillfried that after all it might be the safest expedient for himself to have a robber for a nephew-in-law ; it might secure him against other outlaws, and act as a sort of life and fire insurance policy.

So the family chapel at Castle Taubenheim became witness of a sight never seen there before. How a damsel of the noble house of Taubenhorst was united to a robber, and the old stone knights on the marble tombs did not start up to forbid the banns, nor did the wine in the silver tankards turn to blood as a hundred and fifty guests rose to empty them to the health of the fair bride and the gallant bridegroom.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WHITE DOVE.

TWELVE years had passed away. The good Knight Stillfried had ere this been gathered to his fathers, and had gone to join the bevy of stone knights in the castle chapel. His last years had been spent in peaceful quiet, for since the marriage of his niece with Black Heino no robber had dared to molest the inhabitants of Castle Taubenheim.

And this was not because the country had grown any the more peaceable, for the race of robbers had by no means died out, and the band of freebooters which infested the mountains was yet more terrible than of yore.

The White Dove was the name by which the present chieftain of the band was known. No one could tell exactly why he was thus called ; perhaps it came from his flaxen locks and light blue eyes, which contrasted strangely with the ferocity of his disposi-

tion. In feats of daring and in reckless bloodshed the White Dove far surpassed Black Heino, his predecessor. Under his sway the expeditions of the robber band had assumed wider dimensions than ever. Not a fortress was so well guarded but they managed to approach it; no wall so high but they scaled it with impunity. Every village, every castle had had to pay its tribute to the terrible band of outlaws; Castle Taubenheim alone was spared. A heavy sum had been placed on the head of the White Dove, but as yet his capture had not been effected.

Black Heino was now the lord of Castle Taubenheim, and he ruled it right nobly by the side of his beautiful wife, surrounded by a numerous progeny of well-grown sons and lovely daughters.

Ritter Heino he was now called, and no one ever thought of questioning his title, for riches and prosperity are always sufficient to convince the world of their owner's nobility. The former appellation of Black Heino, as well as the Ritter's ancient profession, was never alluded to in polite society.

On a winter's evening Ritter Heino was sitting in the great hall near a roaring fire, whose dancing flames lit up the vaulted roof. His beautiful wife, the very picture of a German *châtelaine* in her dark velvet robes and fretted silver girdle, was seated at her spinning-wheel, and three or four of her golden-haired children were grouped around her, when this peaceable domestic circle was disturbed by a tumult outside.

The large wolf-hounds in the courtyard had given the alarm, and mingled with their deep bay came other sounds, the clank of arms, and the shouting of men's voices.

The door was thrown open, and a crowd of retainers burst into the room all speaking at a time, and pressing round some object in their midst.

‘We have got him! We have captured him at last! The robber chieftain, the terrible White Dove, who has burnt down fifty villages and has caused the blood of hundreds to flow;’ and all pointed triumphantly to the tall figure in their centre.

The robber chieftain, who now stood bound before Ritter Heino, was a tall sinewy man of about thirty years of age. Without being exactly of what is called athletic build, there was a suggestion of latent strength and of singular resisting power about his iron muscles. His hair, which fell like a lion's mane on his shoulders, was bleached almost as fair as lint; and the same sunshine which had stolen the colour from his locks had given to his face a bronze-like

hue, save at the places where his hair had been pushed aside in the struggle, and there his skin showed milky white, as white as the lily hand of yonder lady. The lips, though delicately curved, bore an expression of haughty command, and his light blue eyes, in their wide open gaze, had something of the fierce glare of a wild beast at bay.

‘So you are the notorious robber chieftain,’ began Ritter Heino, addressing his captive. ‘And you are probably aware that a price of five hundred thalers has been placed on your head?’

‘I am aware,’ said the White Dove with a disdainful smile.

Something in the voice caused Dame Irmengard to look up quickly from her spinning-wheel, and something in the look made Ritter Heino seize a flaming piece of firewood and hold it straight in the prisoner’s face.

‘Good God! Can it be possible?’ he muttered, letting the firebrand sink by his side.

Dame Irmengard gazed long and curiously at the captive freebooter. Was this indeed the man to whom she had once been betrothed? Could this be the Kuno whom she remembered as a downy, white-faced youth, and who had chiefly failed to touch her heart because his face had seemed to her but a repetition of her own? He had not always that eagle glance, nor that imperious curve of the mouth. She only remembered him as a pretty, but gloomy and peevish boy.

‘Ah, if he had always looked thus,’ thought Irmengard, ‘I should not have shrunk from becoming his wife.’

With instinctive comparison she had glanced at her husband, as he stood facing the robber in the firelight glow. The twelve years that had elapsed had been less favourable to the *ci-devant* robber than to his successor. Easy life and good cheer had given to his figure a premature redundancy, and to his face a rubicund hue which considerably modified his romantic appearance.

The robber, meanwhile, was gazing at the beautiful *châtelaine* and at the bevy of fair-haired children around her, then at the warm chimney corner and the well-cushioned seat from which the knight had just risen.

‘My chair, and my wife,’ he muttered to himself. ‘And my children, too, those would have been! Was I wise, indeed, in giving up all that?’

Three sighs re-echoed in the vaulted hall, as each of them thought of what might have been; for our foolish, wayward

human nature ever makes us prize the most the things we no longer have.

The dangerous robber chieftain was confined in the castle's deepest dungeon, and secured with heavy bolts and bars. Nevertheless, when morning came the prison was found to be empty, to the great wonder of the gaolers.

How this had come about, perhaps no one but Ritter Heino himself could have told, for no eye had seen how he had crept down the dungeon staircase at midnight, nor how he had loosened the crossbars, and withdrawn the heavy wooden bolts.

Some hurried phrases, too, he had exchanged with his prisoner as he set him at liberty:—

‘You are going back to the old cavern in the mountains,’ he had said, with something like regret in his voice—‘to the old cavern, with its crystal ceiling and its shadowy niches. You will sleep again on a bed of wild thyme, and be lulled to rest by the voice of the mountain torrent! I never can sleep as well now-a-days in my large clumsy bedstead, with the heavy damask coverlet. Tell me if the old companions are still alive, and give my greetings to Rinaldo and to Wendolin.’

‘Rinaldo was captured three years ago, and was drawn and quartered, more’s the pity,’ answered the chieftain. ‘And Wendolin is still alive, but he lost his right eye and both his ears in some of our skirmishes.’

‘And the dark Sibylla,’ pursued the knight, sentimentally. ‘Is she there still? What glorious black eyes she had, by my troth!’

‘Sibylla has grown coarse and hard-featured,’ said the robber. ‘She cannot be compared to your wife, my fair cousin Irmengard.’

A warm hand-clasp was exchanged between the two, and then the White Dove stepped out into the dark winter night.

The robber, who had been a nobleman, went back to his free-booting companions on the mountain heights, and the nobleman, who had been a robber, returned to his canopied bedstead and his handsome wife.

And if any one should ask for the moral of this short but truthful history, let him take his choice of the following three:—

‘That forbidden fruit are ever the sweetest.’

‘That one good turn deserves another.’

‘And that, although society be divided into robbers and respectable citizens, it is not always an easy matter to make out which are which.’

Sarah Walker.

IT was very hot. Not a breath of air was stirring throughout the western wing of the Greypoint Hotel, and the usual feverish life of its four hundred inmates had succumbed to the weather. The great verandah was deserted ; the corridors were desolated : no footfall echoed in the passages, the lazy rustle of a wandering skirt, or a passing sigh that was half a pant, seemed to intensify the heated silence. An intoxicated bee, disgracefully unsteady in wing and leg, who had been holding an inebriated conversation with himself in the corner of my window pane, had gone to sleep at last and was snoring. The errant prince might have entered the slumberous halls unchallenged, and walked into any of the darkened rooms whose open doors gaped for more air, without awakening the veriest Greypoint flirt with his salutation. At times a drowsy voice, a lazily interjected sentence, an incoherent protest, a long-drawn phrase of saccharine tenuity suddenly broken off with a gasp, came vaguely to the ear as if indicating a half-suspended, half-articulated existence somewhere, but not definite enough to indicate conversation. In the midst of this, there was the sudden crying of a child.

I looked up from my work. Through the camera of my jealously guarded window, I could catch a glimpse of the vivid, quivering blue of the sky, the glittering intensity of the ocean, the long motionless leaves of the horse-chestnut in the road—all utterly inconsistent with anything as active as this lamentation. I stepped to the open door and into the silent hall.

Apparently the noise had attracted the equal attention of my neighbours. A vague chorus of 'Sarah Walker' in querulous recognition, of 'O Lord! that child again!' in hopeless protest, rose faintly from the different rooms. As the lamentations seemed to approach nearer, the visitors' doors were successively shut, swift footsteps hurried along the hall ; past my open door came a momentary vision of a heated nursemaid carrying a tumultuous chaos of frilled skirts, flying sash, rebellious slippers, and tossing curls ; there was a moment's rallying struggle before the room nearly

opposite mine, and then a door opened and shut upon the vision. It was Sarah Walker !

Everybody knew her; few had ever seen more of her than this passing vision. In the great hall, in the dining-room, in the vast parlours, in the garden, in the avenue, on the beach, a sound of lamentation had always been followed by this same brief apparition. Was there a sudden pause among the dancers and a subjugation of the loudest bassoons in the early evening 'hop,' the explanation was given in the words 'Sarah Walker.' Was there a wild confusion among the morning bathers on the sands, people whispered 'Sarah Walker.' A panic among the waiters at dinner, an interruption in the Sunday sacred concert, a disorganisation of the after-dinner promenade on the verandah, was instantly referred to Sarah Walker. Nor were her efforts confined entirely to public life. In cozy corners and darkened recesses, bearded lips withheld the amorous declaration to mutter 'Sarah Walker' between their clenched teeth ; coy and bashful tongues found speech at last in the rapid formulation of 'Sarah Walker.' Nobody ever thought of abbreviating her full name. The two people in the hotel, otherwise individualised, but known only as 'Sarah Walker's father' and 'Sarah Walker's mother,' and never as Mr. and Mrs. Walker, addressed her only as 'Sarah Walker ;' two animals that were occasionally a part of this passing pageant were known as 'Sarah Walker's dog' and 'Sarah Walker's cat,' and later it was my proud privilege to sink my own individuality under the title of 'that friend of Sarah Walker's.'

It must not be supposed that she had attained this baleful eminence without some active criticism. Every parent in the Greypoint Hotel had held his or her theory of the particular defects of Sarah Walker's education ; every virgin and bachelor had openly expressed views of the peculiar discipline that was necessary to her subjugation. It may be roughly estimated that she would have spent the entire nine years of her active life in a dark cupboard on an exclusive diet of bread and water, had this discipline obtained, while on the other hand, had the educational theories of the parental assembly prevailed, she would have ere this shone an etherealised essence in the angelic host. In either event she would have 'ceased from troubling,' which was the general Greypoint idea of higher education. A paper read before our Literary Society on 'Sarah Walker and other infantile diseases,' was referred to in the catalogue as 'Walker, Sarah, Prevention and

Cure,' while the usual burlesque legislation of our summer season culminated in the Act entitled 'An Act to amend an Act entitled an Act for the abatement of Sarah Walker.' As she was hereafter exclusively to be fed 'on the provisions of this Act,' some idea of its general tone may be gathered. It was a singular fact in this point of her history that her natural progenitors not only offered no resistance to the doubtful celebrity of their offspring, but, by hopelessly accepting the situation, to some extent *posed* as Sarah Walker's victims. Mr. and Mrs. Walker were known to be rich, respectable, and indulgent to their only child. They themselves had been evolved from a previous generation of promiscuously acquired wealth into the repose of inherited property, but it was currently accepted that Sarah had 'cast back' and reincarnated some waif on the deck of an emigrant ship at the beginning of the century.

Such was the child separated from me by this portentous history, a narrow passage, and a closed nursery door. Presently, however, the door was partly opened again as if to admit the air. The crying had ceased, but in its place the monotonous Voice of Conscience, for the moment personated by Sarah Walker's nursemaid, kept alive a drowsy recollection of Sarah Walker's transgressions.

'You see,' said the Voice, 'what a dreadful thing it is for a little girl to go on as you do. I am astonished at you, Sarah Walker. So is everybody; so is the good ladies next door; so is the kind gentleman opposite; so is all! Where you expect to go to, 'Evin only knows! How you expect to be forgiven, saints alone can tell! But so it is always, and yet you keep it up. And wouldn't you like it different, Sarah Walker? Wouldn't you like to have everybody love you? Wouldn't you like them good ladies next door and that nice gentleman opposite, all to kinder rise up and say "O what a dear good little girl Sarah Walker is!"' The interpolation of a smacking sound of lips, as if in unctuous anticipation of Sarah Walker's virtue, here ensued—"O, what a dear, good, sw-e-et, lovely little girl Sarah Walker is!"'

There was a dead silence. It may have been fancy, but I thought that some of the doors in the passage creaked softly as if in listening expectation. Then the silence was broken by a sigh. Had Sarah Walker ingloriously succumbed? Rash and impotent conclusion!

'I don't,' said Sarah Walker's voice, slowly rising until it broke on the crest of a mountainous sob, 'I—don't—want—'em—to—

love me. I—don't want—'em—to say—what a—dear—good—little girl—Sarah Walker is!' She caught her breath. 'I—want—'em—to say—what a naughty—bad—dirty—horrid—filthy—little girl Sarah Walker is—so I do. There!'

The doors slammed all along the passages. The dreadful issue was joined. I softly crossed the hall and looked into Sarah Walker's room.

The light from a half-opened shutter fell full upon her rebellious little figure. She had stiffened herself in a large easy-chair into the attitude in which she had been evidently deposited there by the nurse whose torn-off apron she still held rigidly in one hand. Her shapely legs stood out before her, jointless and inflexible to the point of her tiny shoes—a *pose* copied with pathetic fidelity by the French doll at her feet. The attitude must have been dreadfully uncomfortable, and maintained only as being replete with some vague insults to the person who had put her down, as well as exhibiting a wild indecorum of silken stocking. A mystified kitten—Sarah Walker's inseparable—was held as rigidly under one arm with equal dumb aggressiveness. Following the stiff line of her half-recumbent figure, her head suddenly appeared perpendicularly erect—yet the only mobile part of her body. A dazzling sunburst of silky hair, the colour of burnished copper, partly hid her neck and shoulders and the back of the chair. Her eyes were a darker shade of the same colour—the orbits appearing deeper and larger from the rubbing in of habitual tears from long wet lashes. Nothing so far seemed inconsistent with her infelix reputation, but strange to say her other features were marked by delicacy and refinement, and her mouth—that sorely exercised and justly dreaded member—was small and pretty, albeit slightly dropped at the corners.

The immediate effect of my intrusion was limited solely to the nursemaid. Swooping suddenly upon Sarah Walker's too evident *deshabillé*, she made two or three attempts to pluck her into propriety, but the child recognising the cause as well as the effect looked askance at me and only stiffened herself the more. 'Sarah Walker, I'm shocked.'

'It ain't *his* room anyway,' said Sarah, eyeing me malevolently. 'What's he doing here?'

There was so much truth in this that I involuntarily drew back abashed. The nursemaid ejaculated 'Sarah!' and lifted her eyes in hopeless protest.

‘And he needn’t come seeing *you*,’ continued Sarah, lazily rubbing the back of her head against the chair; ‘my papa don’t allow it. He warned you ‘bout the other gentleman, you know.’

‘Sarah Walker !’

I felt it was necessary to say something. ‘Don’t you want to come with me and look at the sea ?’ I said with utter feebleness of invention. To my surprise, instead of actively assaulting me Sarah Walker got up, shook her hair over her shoulders, and took my hand.

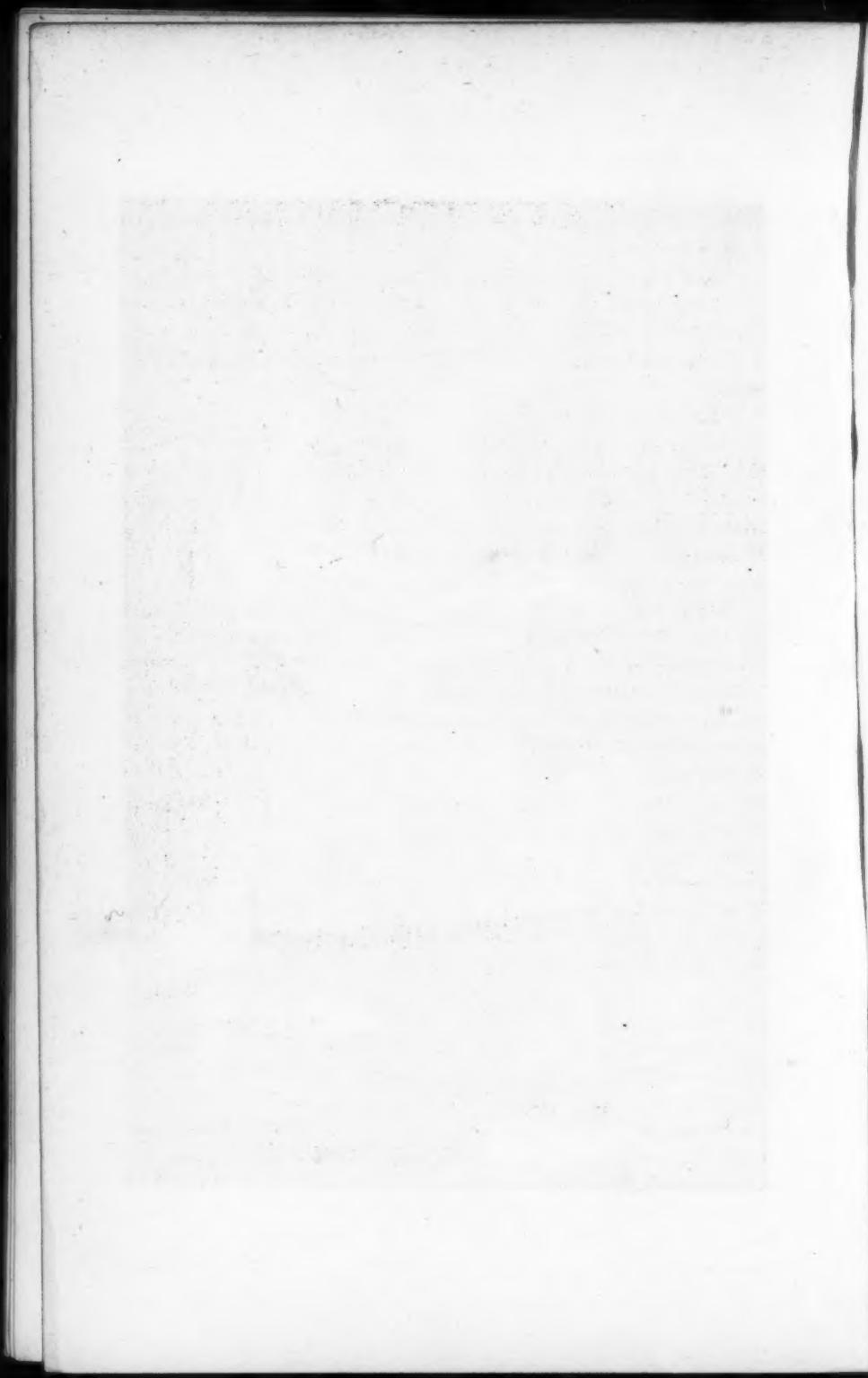
‘With your hair in that state ?’ almost screamed the domestic. But Sarah Walker had already pulled me into the hall. What particularly offensive form of opposition to authority was implied in this prompt assent to my proposal I could only darkly guess. For myself I knew I must appear to her a weak impostor. What would there possibly be in the sea to interest Sarah Walker ? For the moment I prayed for a waterspout, a shipwreck, a whale, or any marine miracle to astound her and redeem my character. I walked guiltily down the hall, holding her hand bashfully in mine. I noticed that her breast began to heave convulsively ; if she cried I knew I should mingle my tears with hers. We reached the verandah in gloomy silence. As I expected, the sea lay before us glittering in the sun—vacant, staring, flat, and hopelessly and unquestionably uninteresting.

‘I knew it all along,’ said Sarah Walker, turning down the corners of her mouth ; ‘there never was anything to see. I know why you got me to come here. You want to tell me if I’m a good girl you’ll take me to sail some day. You want to say if I’m bad the sea will swallow me up. That’s all you want, you horrid thing you !’

‘Hush !’ I said, pointing to the corner of the verandah.

A desperate idea of escape had just seized me. Bolt upright in the recess of a window sat a nursemaid who had succumbed to sleep equally with her helpless charge in the perambulator beside her. I instantly recognised the infant—a popular organism known as ‘Baby Buckly’—the prodigy of the Greyport Hotel, the pet of its enthusiastic womanhood. Fat and featureless, pink and pin-cushiony, it was borrowed by gushing maidenhood, exchanged by idiotic maternity, and had grown unctuous and tumeacent under the kisses and embraces of half the hotel. Even in its present repose it looked moist and shiny from indiscriminate and promiscuous osculation.





‘Let’s borrow Baby Buckly,’ I said recklessly.

Sarah Walker at once stopped crying. I don’t know how she did it, but the cessation was instantaneous, as if she had turned off a tap somewhere.

‘And put it in Mr. Peters’ bed!’ I continued.

Peters being notoriously a grim bachelor, the bare suggestion bristled with outrage. Sarah Walker’s eyes sparkled.

‘You don’t mean it!—go ‘way!—’ she said with affected coyness.

‘But I do! Come.’

We extracted it noiselessly together—that is, Sarah Walker did, with deft womanliness—carried it darkly along the hall to No. 27, and deposited it in Peters’ bed, where it lay like a freshly opened oyster. We then returned hand in hand to my room, where we looked out of the window on the sea. It was observable that there was no lack of interest in Sarah Walker now.

Before five minutes had elapsed some one breathlessly passed the open door while we were still engaged in marine observation. This was followed by return footsteps and a succession of swiftly rustling garments, until the majority of the women in our wing had apparently passed our room, and we saw an irregular stream of nursemaids and mothers converging towards the hotel out of the grateful shadow of arbours, trees, and marquees. In fact we were still engaged in observation when Sarah Walker’s nurse came to fetch her away and to inform her that ‘by rights’ Baby Buckly’s nurse and Mr. Peters should both be made to leave the hotel that very night. Sarah Walker permitted herself to be led off with dry but expressive eyes. That evening she did not cry, but, on being taken into the usual custody for disturbance, was found to be purple with suppressed laughter.

This was the beginning of my intimacy with Sarah Walker. But while it was evident that whatever influence I obtained over her was due to my being *particeps criminis*, I think it was accepted that a regular abduction of infants might become in time monotonous if not dangerous. So she was satisfied with the knowledge that I could not now, without the most glaring hypocrisy, obtrude a moral superiority upon her. I do not think she would have turned State evidence and accused me, but I was by no means assured of her disinterested regard. She contented herself, for a few days afterwards, with meeting me privately and mysteriously communicating unctuous reminiscences of our joint crime,

without suggesting a repetition. Her intimacy with me did not seem to interfere with her general relations to her own species in the other children in the hotel. Perhaps I should have said before that her popularity with them was by no means prejudiced by her infelicitous reputation. But while she was secretly admired by all, she had few professed followers and no regular associates. Whether the few whom she selected for that baleful pre-eminence were either torn from her by horrified guardians, or came to grief through her dangerous counsels, or whether she really did not care for them, I could not say. Their elevation was brief, their retirement unregretted. It was however permitted me, through felicitous circumstances, to become acquainted with the probable explanation of her unsociability.

The very hot weather culminated one afternoon in a dead faint of earth and sea and sky. An Alpine cloudland of snow that had mocked the upturned eyes of Greyport for hours, began to darken under the folding shadow of a black and velvety wing. The atmosphere seemed to thicken as the gloom increased; the lazy dust thrown up by hurrying feet that sought a refuge, hung almost motionless in the air. Suddenly it was blown to the four quarters in one fierce gust that as quickly dispersed the loungers drooping in shade and cover. For a few seconds the long avenue was lost in flying clouds of dust, and then was left bare of life or motion. Raindrops in huge stars and rosettes appeared noiselessly and magically upon the side-walks—gouts of moisture apparently dropped from mid-air. And then the ominous hush returned.

A mile away along the rocks, I turned for shelter into a cavernous passage of the overhanging cliff, where I could still watch the coming storm upon the sea. A murmur of voices presently attracted my attention. I then observed that the passage ended in a kind of open grotto, where I could dimly discern the little figures of several children who, separated from their nurses in the sudden onset of the storm, had taken refuge there. As the gloom deepened they became silent again, until the stillness was broken by a familiar voice. There was no mistaking it.—It was Sarah Walker's. But it was not lifted in lamentation, it was raised only as if resuming a suspended narrative.

'Her name,' said Sarah Walker gloomily, 'was Kribbles. She was the only child—of—of orphaned parentage, and fair to see, but she was bad, and God did not love her. And one day she was separated from her nurse on a desert island like to this. And then

came a hideous thunderstorm. And a great big thunderbolt came galumping after her. And it ketched her and rolled all over her—so! and then it came back and ketched her and rolled her over—so! And when they came to pick her up there was not so much as *that* left of her. All burnt up!'

'Wasn't there just a little bit of her shoe?' suggested a cautious auditor.

'Not a bit,' said Sarah Walker firmly. All the other children echoed 'Not a bit,' indignantly, in evident gratification at the completeness of Kribbles' catastrophe. At this moment the surrounding darkness was suddenly filled with a burst of blue celestial fire; the heavy inky sea beyond, the black-edged mourning horizon, the gleaming sands, each nook and corner of the dripping cave, with the frightened faces of the huddled group of children, started into vivid life for an instant, and then fell back with a deafening crash into the darkness.

There was a slight sound of whimpering. Sarah Walker apparently pounced upon the culprit, for it ceased.

'Sniffling 'tracts 'lectricity,' she said sententiously.

'But you thaid it wath Dod!' lisped a casuist of seven.

'It's all the same,' said Sarah sharply, 'and so's asking questions.'

This obscure statement was however apparently understood, for the casuist lapsed into silent security. 'Lots of things 'tracts it,' continued Sarah Walker. 'Gold and silver, and metals and knives and rings.'

'And pennies?'

'And pennies most of all! Kribbles was that vain, she used to wear jewelry and fly in the face of Providence.'

'But you thaid—'

'Will you?—There! you hear that?' There was another blinding flash and a bounding roll of thunder along the shore. 'I wonder you didn't ketch it. You would—only I'm here.'

All was quiet again, but from certain indications it was evident that a collection of those dangerous articles that had proved fatal to the unhappy Kribbles, was being taken up. I could hear the clink of coins and jingle of ornaments. That Sarah herself was the custodian was presently shown. 'But won't the lightning come to you now?' asked a timid voice.

'No,' said Sarah, promptly, 'cause I ain't afraid! Look!'

A frightened protest from the children here ensued, but the

next instant she appeared at the entrance of the grotto and ran down the rocks towards the sea. Skipping from boulder to boulder she reached the furthest projection of the ledge, now partly submerged by the rising surf, and then turned half triumphantly, half defiantly, towards the grotto. The weird phosphorescence of the storm lit up the resolute little figure standing there, gorgeously bedecked with the chains, rings, and shiny trinkets of her companions. With a tiny hand raised in mock defiance of the elements she seemed to lean confidently against the panting breast of the gale, with fluttering skirt and flying tresses. Then the vault behind her cracked with three jagged burning fissures, a weird flame leaped upon the sand, there was a cry of terror from the grotto, echoed by a scream of nurses on the cliff, a deluge of rain, a terrific onset from the gale—and—Sarah Walker was gone? Nothing of the kind! When I reached the ledge, after a severe struggle with the storm, I found Sarah on the leeward side, drenched but delighted. I held her tightly, while we waited for a lull to regain the cliff, and took advantage of the sympathetic situation.

‘But you know you *were* frightened, Sarah,’ I whispered; ‘you thought of what happened to poor Kribbles.’

‘Do you know who Kribbles was?’ she asked confidentially.

‘No.’

‘Well,’ she whispered, ‘I made Kribbles up. And the hideous storm and thunderbolt—and the burning! All out of my own head.’

The only immediate effect of this escapade was apparently to precipitate and bring into notoriety the growing affection of an obscure lover of Sarah Walker’s, hitherto unsuspected. He was a mild inoffensive boy of twelve known as ‘Warts,’ solely from an inordinate exhibition of these youthful excrescences. On the day of Sarah Walker’s adventure his passion culminated in a sudden and illogical attack upon Sarah’s nurse and parents while they were bewailing her conduct, and in assaulting them with his feet and hands. Whether he associated them in some vague way with the cause of her momentary peril, or whether he only wished to impress her with the touching flattery of a general imitation of her style, I cannot say. For his love-making was peculiar. A day or two afterwards he came to my open door and remained for some moments bashfully looking at me. The next day I found him standing by my chair in the piazza with an embarrassed air and in

utter inability to explain his conduct. At the end of a rapid walk on the sand one morning, I was startled by the sound of hurried breath, and looking around, discovered the staggering Warts quite exhausted by endeavouring to keep up with me on his short legs. At last the daily recurrence of his haunting presence forced a dreadful suspicion upon me. Warts was courting *me* for Sarah Walker! Yet it was impossible to actually connect her with these mute attentions. 'You want me to give them to Sarah Walker,' I said cheerfully one afternoon, as he laid upon my desk some peculiarly uninviting crustacea which looked not unlike a few detached excrescences from his own hands. He shook his head decidedly. 'I understand,' I continued, confidently; 'you want me to keep them for her.' 'No,' said Warts, doggedly. 'Then you only want me to tell her how nice they are?' The idea was apparently so shamelessly true that he blushed himself hastily into the passage—and ceased any future contribution. Naturally still more ineffective was the slightest attempt to bring his devotion into the physical presence of Sarah Walker. The most ingenious schemes to lure him into my room while she was there failed utterly. Yet he must have at one time basked in her baleful presence. 'Do you like Warts?' I asked her one day bluntly. 'Yes,' said Sarah Walker with cheerful directness, 'ain't *he* got a lot of 'em?—though he used to have more. But,' she added reflectively, 'do you know the little Ilsey boy?' I was compelled to admit my ignorance. 'Well!' she said with a reminiscent sigh of satisfaction, 'he's got only two toes on his left foot—showed 'em to me. And he was born so.' Need it be said that in these few words I read the dismal sequel of Warts' unfortunate attachment? His accidental eccentricity was no longer attractive. What were his evanescent accretions, subject to improvement or removal, beside the hereditary and settled malformations of his rival?

Once only, in this brief summer episode, did Sarah Walker attract the impulsive and general sympathy of Greypoint. It is only just to her consistency to say it was through no fault of hers, unless a characteristic exposure which brought on a chill and diphtheria could be called her own act. Howbeit, towards the close of the season, when a sudden suggestion of the coming autumn had crept, one knew not how, into the heart of a perfect day; when even a return of the summer warmth had a suspicion of hectic; on one of these days Sarah Walker was missed with the bees and the butterflies. For two days her voice had not been heard

in hall or corridor, nor had the sunshine of her French marigold head lit up her familiar places. The two days were days of relief, yet mitigated with a certain uneasy apprehension of the return of Sarah Walker, or—more alarming thought!—the Sarah Walker element in a more appalling form. So strong was this impression that an unhappy infant who unwittingly broke this interval with his maiden outcry was nearly lynched. ‘We’re not going to stand that from *you*, you know,’ was the crystallised sentiment of a brutal bachelor. In fact, it began to be admitted that Greypoint had been accustomed to Sarah Walker’s ways. In the midst of this, it was suddenly whispered that Sarah Walker was lying dangerously ill and was not expected to live.

Then occurred one of those strange revulsions of human sentiment which at first seem to point the dawning of a millennium of poetic justice, but which in this case ended in merely stirring the languid pulses of society into a hectic fever, and in making sympathy for Sarah Walker an insincere and exaggerated fashion. Morning and afternoon visits to her apartment with extravagant offerings were *de rigueur*, bulletins were issued three times a day, an allusion to her condition was the recognised preliminary to all conversation; advice, suggestions, and petitions to restore the baleful existence flowed readily from the same facile invention that had once proposed its banishment; until one afternoon the shadow had drawn so close that even Folly withheld its careless feet before it, and laid down its feeble tinkling bells and gaudy cap tremblingly on the threshold. But the sequel must be told in more vivid words than mine.

‘Whin I saw that angel lyin’ there,’ said Sarah Walker’s nurse, ‘as white, if ye plaze, as if the whole blessed blood of her body had gone to make up the beautiful glory of her hair; speechless as she was, I thought I saw a sort of longin’ in her eyes.

“‘Is it anythin’ you’ll be wantin’, Sarah darlint,’ sez her mother with a thremblin’ voice, “afore its lavin’ us ye are? Is it the minister yer askin’ for, love?” sez she.

‘And Sarah looked at me, and if it was the last words I spake, her lips moved and she whispered “Scotty.”

“‘Wirra! wirra!’ sez the mother, “it’s wanderin’ she is, the darlin’;” for Scotty, don’t ye see, was the grand bar-keeper of the hotel.

“‘Savin’ yer presence, ma’am,’ sez I, “and the child’s here,

ez is half a saint already, it's thruth she's spakin'—it's Scotty she wants." And with that my angel blinks wid her black eyes "yes."

"Bring him," says the docthor, "at once."

"And they bring him in wid all the mustachios and moighty fine curls of him, and his diamonds, rings, and pins all a-glisten-ing just like his eyes when he set 'em on that suffering saint.

"Is it anythin' you're wantin', Sarah dear?" sez he, thryin' to spake firm. And Sarah looks at him, and then looks at a tumbler on the table.

"Is it a bit of a cocktail, the likes of the one I made for ye last Sunday unbeknownst?" sez he, looking round mortal afraid of the parents. And Sarah Walker's eyes said, "It is." Then the minister groaned, but the docthor jumps to his feet.

"Bring it," sez he, "and howld your jaw, an ye 's a Christian sowl." And he brought it. An' after the first sip, the child lifts herself up on one arm, and sez, with a swate smile and a toss of the glass:

"I looks towards you, Scotty," sez she.

"I observes you and bows, miss," sez he, makin' as if he was dhrinkin' wid her.

"Here's another nail in yer coffin, old man," sez she, winkin'.

"And here's the hair all off your head, miss," sez he quite aisily, tossin' back the joke betwixt 'em.

"And with that she dhrinks it off, and lies down and goes to sleep like a lamb, and wakes up wid de rosy dawn in her cheeks, and the morthal seekness gone for ever."

* * * * *

Thus Sarah Walker recovered. Whether the fact were essential to the moral conveyed in these pages, I leave the reader to judge.

I was leaning on the terrace of the *Kronprinzen-Hof* at Roland-seck one hot summer afternoon, lazily watching the groups of tourists strolling along the road that ran between the *Hof* and the Rhine. There was certainly little in the place or its atmosphere to recall the Greypoint episode of twenty years before, when I was suddenly startled by hearing the name of 'Sarah Walker.'

In the road below me were three figures, a lady, a gentleman, and a little girl. As the latter turned towards the lady who addressed her, I recognised the unmistakable copper-coloured tresses, trim figure, delicate complexion, and refined features of the

friend of my youth ! I seized my hat, but by the time I had reached the road, they had disappeared.

The utter impossibility of its being Sarah Walker herself, and the glaring fact that the very coincidence of name would be inconsistent with any conventional descent from the original Sarah, I admit confused me. But I examined the book of the 'Kronprinzen-Hof' and the other hotels, and questioned my *portier*. There was no 'Mees' nor 'Madame Walkiere' extant in Rolandseck. Yet might not Monsieur have heard incorrectly ? The Czara Walka was evidently Russian, and Rolandseck was a resort for Russian princes. But pardon ! Did Monsieur really mean the young demoiselle now approaching ? Ah ! that was a different affair. She was the daughter of the Italian Prince and Princess Monte Castello staying here. The lady with her was not the Princess, but a foreign friend. The gentleman was the Prince. Would he present Monsieur's card ?

They were entering the hotel. The Prince was a little inoffensive-looking man, the lady an evident countrywoman of my own, and the child—was, yet was *not*, Sarah ! There was the face, the outline, the figure—but the life, the verve, the audacity, was wanting ! I could contain myself no longer.

'Pardon an inquisitive compatriot, madam,' I said ; 'but I heard you a few moments ago address this young lady by the name of a very dear young friend, whom I knew twenty years ago —Sarah Walker. Am I right ?'

The Prince stopped and gazed at us both with evident affright ; then suddenly recognising in my freedom some wild American indecorum, doubtless provoked by the presence of another of my species, which he really was not expected to countenance, retreated behind the *portier*. The circumstance by no means increased the good-will of the lady as she replied somewhat haughtily :

'The Principessina is named Sarah Walker after her mother's maiden name.'

'Then this *is* Sarah Walker's daughter ! ' I said joyfully.

'She is the daughter of the Prince and Princess of Monte Castello,' corrected the lady frigidly.

'I had the pleasure of knowing her mother very well.' I stopped and blushed. Did I really know Sarah Walker very well ? And would Sarah Walker know me now ? Or would it not be very like her to go back on me ? There was certainly anything but promise in the feeble-minded, vacuous copy of Sarah before me.

I was yet hesitating, when the Prince, who had possibly received some quieting assurance from the *portier*, himself stepped forward, stammered that the Princess would, without doubt, be charmed to receive me later, and skipped upstairs, leaving the impression on my mind that he contemplated ordering his bill at once. There was no excuse for further prolonging the interview. 'Say good-bye to the strange gentleman, Sarah,' suggested Sarah's companion stiffly. I looked at the child in the wild hope of recognising some prompt resistance to the suggestion that would have identified her with the lost Sarah of my youth—but in vain. 'Good-bye, sir,' said the affected little creature, dropping a mechanical curtsey. 'Thank you very much for remembering my mother.' 'Good-bye, Sarah!' It was indeed Good-bye for ever.

For on my way to my room I came suddenly upon the Prince in a recess of the upper hall addressing somebody through an open door with a querulous protest, whose wild extravagance of statement was grotesquely balanced by its utter feeble timidity of manner. 'It is,' said the Prince, 'indeed a grave affair. We have here hundreds of socialists, emissaries from lawless countries and impossible places, who travel thousands of miles to fall upon our hearts and embrace us. They establish an espionage over us, they haunt our walks in incredible numbers, they hang in droves upon our footsteps, Heaven alone saves us from a public osculation at any moment! They openly allege that they have dandled us on their knees at recent periods, washed and dressed us, and would do so still. Our happiness, our security——'

'Don't be a fool, Prince. Do shut up!'

The Prince collapsed and shrank away, and I hurried past the open door. A tall, magnificent-looking woman was standing before a glass, arranging her heavy red hair. The face, which had been impatiently turned towards the door, had changed again to profile with a frown still visible on the bent brow. Our eyes met as I passed. The next moment the door slammed, and I had seen the last of Sarah Walker.

BRET HARTE.

Psychical Research.

‘WELL, Wilde, I’m glad to see you back again. I’m sorry I can’t introduce you to my wife just now, but she is out, and won’t be back very much before dinner, I expect. She left apologies and all that sort of thing for you, though.’

It was my most intimate friend and old school-fellow Barry who spoke, as he stood with his back to his drawing-room fire, and I reclined almost at his feet in the easiest of easy chairs. I had only returned to England three days before, after more than two years of Eastern wanderings, during which the only news I had had of Barry had been a vague announcement of his approaching marriage. On my arrival I had promptly obtained from the Arts Club his address at ‘passionate Brompton,’ and as soon as I had a moment to spare I went to see him, only giving him notice of my intentions in a note posted the night before.

My friend was an amateur photographer of the most enthusiastic type, and I knew him too well not to be aware that a quarter of an hour would not pass without his hobby’s coming into the conversation somehow or other. After five or ten minutes’ inconsequential chatter it came.

‘You would like a before-dinner cigar,’ he said. ‘My wife doesn’t allow them here—says they spoil the curtains. Come up into my study, and I’ll show you some of my work. I have not done much lately, but I worked hard before I was married, and I think some of the Derbyshire scenes are really worth looking at.’

The room into which I followed him needs no description. One room full of photographs is uncommonly like another. Cigars lighted, there followed ten minutes or so of the boredom of looking at photographs of rocks, glens, and waterfalls; interesting to the taker, no doubt, but utterly without attraction to anyone else. With an immense pile of cardboard still before me I determined to break the tyranny at any price, or at least change the form of infliction.

‘By the way,’ I said, ‘the instantaneous process was becoming

fashionable when I left England. Have you done anything in that way ?'

Alas ! He had.

' Oh ! yes,' he answered cheerfully, dragging down a huge album from a shelf ; ' all these were done by the new process. Look at them.'

I pushed the pile of scenery away. I had got rid of *that*, at any rate, and I took the huge book upon my knees with about as lively a sense of relief as that with which a convict turns from the sober occupation of oakum-picking to the lighter frivolity of the treadmill.

Now, I thought, for trains in motion without wheels, horses galloping with fifty legs apiece, and swans on the Thames with half a dozen necks each.

I opened it at the first page.

' By Jove ! ' If this was the sort of thing my friend had been instantaneously photographing—by all means, plenty of it !

The first picture in the book was a portrait. A head. A woman's head, and nothing more. Though a little indistinct and blurred in outline, there was definiteness enough in the photograph to make manifest a beauty such as might have inspired the delicate pencil of a Leighton in his most ideal mood. It was a face which, had it been exhibited in a gallery of 'Types of Beauty,' would have represented my views on the subject with perfect accuracy, and I venture to think would have been awarded the palm (or the golden apple, isn't it ?) by nine-tenths of my fellow-men. The expression of the face was one of sadness, but only the sadness of a passing thought, not a deep-seated sorrow ; such an expression as might shade the face of an angel on a temporary visit to our earth, and which would pass away with the first stroke of the wings in its flight homewards. These criticisms, I may remark, are of course the result of subsequent reflections. My only feeling at the moment was one of pure admiration.

' What a beautiful face ! ' I said ; ' but was it taken at a spiritualist *séance*, that you had to use the instantaneous process for it ? '

Barry looked particularly pleased.

' Well,' he said, ' you're rather happy in your guess. It was something very like it ; but that is an enlarged photo. The original is on the next page.'

I turned the page.

‘By Jove!’ again, this time with much greater surprise.

This was a smaller picture—rather larger than what they call, I think, cabinet size. It was the picture of a grave. The head and only stone was a large cross, not high, but thick and broad, very roughly hewn, and resting upon a ponderous pedestal, also of stone, but nearly covered with creepers. Right across the cross, and hiding the inscription from a casual glance, clung a wild rose, which also covered the mound of the grave itself. Close behind it, forming a background of darkness, grew a yew-tree, whose dense foliage seemed to fall round the cross like a curtain, and throw it into bolder relief. But what caught the eye first was none of these things—though I have mentioned them first—but a face that looked at you from over one of the arms of the cross. The face I have just attempted to describe. The body must have been hidden by the cross and the creepers. The face alone was visible, and in the deep shade thrown by the tree the effect was startling and ghostly in the extreme.

‘Why,’ I said, ‘what a grisly sort of place for a lady to choose for a “sitting”! or was it really a spirit, for which your instantaneous process was a bit too quick?’

‘There is nothing “grisly” in a woman’s grave,’ replied Barry, a little stiffly; ‘but,’ he added, more in his usual tone, ‘that was an accidental portrait—at least, I suppose most people would call it so—though I am inclined to believe in special providences.’

‘Ah, yes!’ I said, ‘just so—a sort of “sweet little cherub” to keep watch over poor amateur photographers, and bring beautiful young ladies into the focus of their cameras!’

‘No! but seriously, I think the story of that picture would interest you, and I intended telling it you in any case. Shall I have time before——’ (looking at the little clock on the mantel-shelf). ‘Oh, yes! plenty, I think.’

‘I am all attention,’ I said; ‘but one question first. Is there anything supernatural about it? Is this face that of a denizen of churchyards or of drawing-rooms?’

‘Wait and hear,’ he said, and keeping the picture on my knee, I settled down in my chair, and my friend began.

‘About two years ago, I was taking an intense interest in Saxon churches, about which my friend Norton (you know him) was intending to bring out a book—an *édition de luxe*, with photographic illustrations. I had nothing particular to do, and

he gave me a list of churches he wanted taken in the Midlands ; and so I devoted one June to the pleasant task.

‘ I had been pretty busy knocking about in Worcestershire for a fortnight, when I saw that the next job on my list was a porch and two windows of the church of Bringley, quite a small town in the next county. Consulting the train arrangements, I found I should have to spend at least five hours at the place, though my work there would not take much more than half an hour, and my next halting-place was sixty miles off. However, I thought it would not do to miss it, as the name was marked on my list with a star, which meant important, and the next morning I packed traps, and left by the first train. It did not take me long to finish the porch and windows, the only pieces of Saxon work that had escaped the destructive hands of time and the “ Restoration Society.” Then I had nothing to do for three or four hours ; so I cast about for any picturesque graves that might be worth amusing oneself with. The graves in Bringley are singularly uninteresting, and I was just about shaking the dust off my feet, when, right in a corner of the churchyard, and quite by itself, I saw the cross and beautiful cedar that make up that picture. I walked over and arranged my camera, put on one of the dry plates, and finished the whole business in three minutes.’

‘ But what about the young lady—or young spirit ? ’ I struck in. Didn’t it take more than three minutes to arrange that piece of grouping ? ’

‘ Well, wait a minute,’ was the answer given, rather impatiently.

‘ The whole story centres round that same young spirit. The mystery has only just begun. When I took the photo, I saw no face near the grave and heard no sound, and believed most firmly that I was the only human being (above ground) in the place. Subsequent investigations strengthened this idea up to the point of certainty, as you will hear. Of course you know that the new process is much simpler and less troublesome than the old. The impression is taken literally *instantly*, and then there is no more bother until you develop the plate, which may be days afterwards, or even weeks if you like. I am extremely sorry to have to bother you with all these technical details, but in this case they are necessary.’

‘ Oh ! don’t mention it,’ I said. ‘ I always *did* love amateur photography.’

‘Yes, I know,’ he went on. ‘All the plates I was doing for Norman’s book I developed as soon as possible, but those I took for my own amusement I let bide until I had spare time on my hands. Of course that picture was one of them, and I did not touch it until I again got back to my studio at Hampstead. Now, please to get yourself into a proper state of mind, or you won’t appreciate what I am going to tell you. That you will hardly do in any case, though, as *you* have only seen the picture as it is *now*. I had, or believed I had, photographed it as it is *not*. Judge then, if you can, of my overwhelming wonderment, my immense surprise, when I developed the plate, to find that face, which I think you have been good enough to admire, looking at me from over the cross.’

‘The most natural explanation——,’ I began.

‘Yes,’ he interrupted, ‘I know all about that. You are a philosopher, I am only an artist, and *my* first feeling was not a demand for explanation—natural otherwise—but one of simple admiration. Ridiculous as it may seem to you, great traveller and physicist, I—to put the matter shortly—fell in love with my lady of the tombs there and then, and held the picture in my hands in a rapture, for I don’t know how long, before I so much as thought of explanations. Even when I did think, though, the “natural explanation,” as you call it, was not so easy to arrive at. This grave was some distance from the others, and stood quite alone, having no tree or shrub near it but the yew. I had contemplated it for some time before deciding to take it, and I was quite certain that no one approached it during that time. Of course, when I focussed the scene I necessarily had my eyes on it, and it was absolutely impossible that I should have missed seeing a face—her face above all—had it been there. Now, spiritualist as I am, and dreamer as you think me, I always seek a “natural explanation” of any apparent mystery *first*, and I decided on doing so in this case. Had I not been honestly in love with the vision, I should have simply kept the portrait as a subject for pleasant speculations when I had nothing better to do; but I was in love, yes, really in love, and I made up my mind to solve this mystery without delay.’

‘And you discovered that it was the wife of the curate?’ I said.

‘No, I didn’t,’ was the reply, ‘and you had better have another cigar, Wilde; it will keep you from making futile interruptions.

I could not leave town for two or three days, and during that time I enlarged the head into that picture which you saw first, and when I went to Bringley I took both pictures with me. I got down there too late to attempt anything that night, and though I turned the subject over in my mind all the way down, and continued to do so till I fell asleep, I could not arrive at any very definite conclusion as to where to begin. It would hardly do to go about showing my portrait to everyone I met, and asking if they knew who it was. Such a course was calculated to give rise to unpleasant speculations as to one's sanity ; and, on the other hand, I did not feel much inclined to settle down in the place for an indefinite period, and go in for staring in the faces of all the young ladies for miles round, in the hope of meeting the subject of my dreams. The next morning I did what I suppose anyone else would have done under the circumstances—I went straight to the churchyard, and to the grave itself. All was as silent and solitary as upon the last occasion. I went close to the cross, and, putting aside the wild rose, I read :

“Sacred to the memory of Beatrice Lasalle, who died Oct. 18, 1862, aged 21 years. ‘Until the dawn.’”

‘Now it was impossible for me, think of the matter how I might, to get rid of the idea that it was no mere chance that had brought the lady of my picture to this grave, and I felt absolutely certain that could I discover the whereabouts of the relations of the dead woman, I should not be far off another look into the eyes of the living one. I went back to the inn and at once asked the landlord if anyone of the name of Lasalle lived in the neighbourhood. No, he had never heard the name. How long had he lived in the town ? About ten years. How long had the parson of the place held the living ? Only about four years. The last man had been an old bachelor, and had held the post for forty years. Oh ! well, who was the oldest inhabitant, where did he live, and was he in his dotage or capable of answering questions ? Mine host did not “rightly know” which was the oldest inhabitant, but he knew an old one, and that was not a “he” but a “she,” who lived about a mile off, and could *answer* questions but could not hear them, being stone deaf. Encouraging, wasn’t it ? However, I meant to try all I knew ; so I got this lady’s address, and presently reached the cottage of the ancient dame who was supposed to know all about everybody, and whose name was Suggidge. It was a well-built, substantial little house, with a garden much better than

most of those I had passed. A good-looking woman of about forty came out of the door to meet me as I unlatched the garden gate. Surely this was not the afflicted female? It wasn't.

‘What might I want?

‘To see Mrs. Suggidge. Had I the pleasure of speaking to her?

‘Yes—young Mrs. Suggidge. Old Mrs. Suggidge was indoors.

‘Ah! it was old Mrs. Suggidge I wanted to see, to ask her a few questions about a family that once lived near.

‘Oh, then it was all right; there was nothing mother liked better than answering questions, if she could be got to hear them, but that was an event which seldom happened, it seemed. I was shown into a nice comfortable little room, in which the object of my search sat busily knitting. The daughter having introduced me and my business to her in a voice strikingly like the shriek of a railway engine, she said she should be happy to tell me anything she could about anybody. Grateful for this extreme amiability, I collected all my energies, and imitating, as nearly as I could, but still feebly, the timbre and pitch of the daughter's voice, asked her if she knew if a family named Lasalle had ever lived thereabouts. The effort was a failure. She knew no one named Russell nearer than Bilston town, and he was a butcher who beat his wife.

‘Feeling sure that I could never excel, or even equal, my first supreme endeavour, I asked the younger woman if her mother-in-law could read.

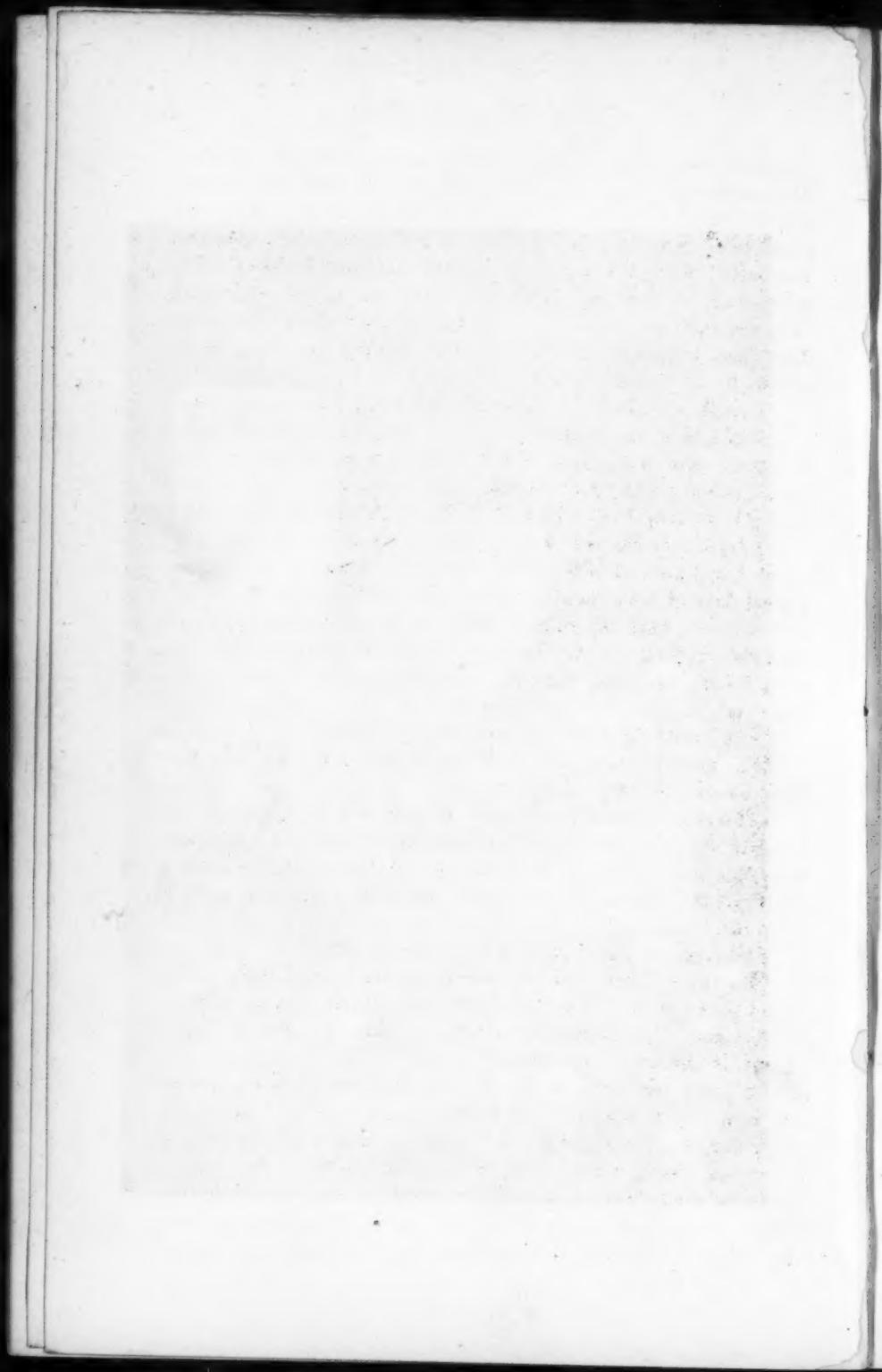
‘Yes, but she was always hurt if questions were written, as she did not like to be thought hard of hearing—was even offended if she thought folks shouted at her.

‘“Oh! for heaven's sake, then, tell her I have a sore throat, and cannot speak above a whisper, and do you act as mouthpiece for me,” I said.

‘Mrs. Suggidge, junior, was not a fanatic in the cause of “Absolute Truth,” and promptly did as I wished. A temporary check was even then put upon the investigation by the mother's commiseration of my misfortune, and her recommendation of several dozen infallible remedies. The question was put and heard at last, however, and the answer came.

‘Yes, she knew whom I meant. Twenty or more years ago a newly-married gentleman and lady of that name had bought a house and grounds close by. She herself had even lived in the house several times when upper servants had suddenly left.





‘Had they many relations? None that she knew of. At least, Mr. Lasalle may have had some; but she had heard Mrs. Lasalle say she had not a soul related to her. They had only been here about two years when the lady died in giving birth to a son, and was buried in the churchyard in a grave that stood by itself. The gentleman left the neighbourhood at once, taking the infant with him, and she had never heard of them again. Even the house itself had practically ceased to exist, having been altogether altered by its present occupier and owner.

‘I am free to admit that this was a “facer”! This was all then! The whole affair had begun at a grave, and, it seemed, had made this circle only to end there. But I remembered my picture. At least I could set my mind at rest as to whether that face was the face of a woman, or, as I had sometimes half believed, of a spirit.

‘I asked the old lady some questions about one or two names which I had noticed in the churchyard, and I believe she told me a good deal of their family history. When I thought her mind and memory were far enough from this dead Beatrice to make possible recognition not quite a matter of immediate association, I took that face from its case, and, holding it out to her, said :

‘“Did you ever know anyone at all like this?”

‘She gave a little start. “Ah! yes,” she said, “it’s poor dear Mrs. Lasalle her very self!”

‘This was a tremendous piece of evidence in favour of my hitherto vaguely defined spiritual hypothesis, but I did not depart from the usual course of investigation. I belong to the Society for Psychical Research, you know, and our method is strictly scientific.’

I repressed a smile, and my friend continued.

‘I tried to shake the old lady by as much cross-examination as politeness would permit, and only desisted out of consideration for “young” Mrs. Suggidge, whose voice showed signs of giving out under the prolonged strain.

‘“How could I be mistaken?” were the last words I heard on the subject. “Oughtn’t I to know the pretty face I saw most every day, week in and week out, to say nothing of sitting looking at her all church time every Sunday, because she was such a picture of a lady? Who should know her, if not me, when it was me helped to lay her in her coffin at the last? Ah, deary me! and she looked as white and as sweet as a lily, poor lamb.”

‘There was nothing more to be said after that, so I put an end to the conversation, and we parted with mutual expressions of esteem.

‘I came back to town, with the full certainty that the subtly sensitive plate had caught what the dull eye had failed to distinguish—the face of Beatrice Lasalle. There was another certainty, too—that I was in love, and in deadly, serious love, with the spirit of a woman who had been twenty years in the grave. I caught myself wondering rather often whether Mr. Lasalle were alive or not, which was very absurd, as of course it couldn’t make the slightest difference to me.

‘I spent a week at Hampstead, doing nothing but look at this likeness and ponder over all these strange circumstances, till I worked myself into a mental condition impossible to describe. It flashed upon me suddenly one evening, while I was looking at my picture, that if this went on I should *go mad*.

‘This idea was as new as it was unpleasant, and its effects were electric. Within forty-eight hours I was journeying down to Derbyshire, having accepted an invitation from some very pleasant and matter-of-fact people. I went down resolved to forget my Bringley experience as entirely as possible, and not even to look at the portrait during my visit. I had not the strength of mind to leave it behind me.

‘I suppose it was a natural result of that queerly spent week, and of the hurry of my final preparations, that I reached Mellor Hall with a terrible headache—one of those malignant headaches which reduce you to a state when you can’t speak to anyone without hating him, or look at anything without cursing it—when sitting seems worse than standing, lying down worse than either; when, above all things, you are impelled to fly from the face of man. I couldn’t go down to dinner, and I spent my evening in a violent struggle against my desire to divert myself in the way I had forsaken; that is, by weaving fool’s fancies round “that little head of hers,” as Browning has it.

‘I had been lying down, and I don’t know what time it was, when I thought I would try the effect of the night air. I threw the window open, and leaning my elbows on the ledge looked out. It was a perfect August night. The great yellow moon hung in a cloudless sky. Before me lay the beautiful garden. Beyond it stretched rock and wood and water, and the picture was closed in all round by grey undulating hills, dotted here and there with

grey, desolate-looking farms and cottages. I don't think I ever saw such "ivory moonlight."

"Members of the Psychical Society," I put in, "ought not to sit in the moonlight; it is thought to have a special bearing on their complaint."

"Do reserve your criticisms of that society till I've done my story. Mrs. Barry will be back directly."

"Yes," I answered; "it would be as well to get the story done before she comes in. Perhaps she doesn't take as much interest as I do in your reminiscences of old flames—even spirit ones."

"Well," he went on, "as I was telling you, the moon was lighting up every stick and stone in the garden. Every leaf was distinct—more distinct than in daylight. I almost thought I could count the petals of the flowers. Then I turned my face upwards to the "plainness and clearness without shadow of stain."

"The beauty of the night was so supreme, so vast, that it carried one quite out of one's miserable little self. I had forgotten myself and my own troubles, when I turned my eyes earthwards again and saw *her*. She was standing there in the very middle of the lawn, with clasped hands and face upturned. The full splendour of the moonlight fell on the crisp gold threads of her hair. She was dressed in some sort of white diaphanous drapery. And all these details I saw as distinctly as I had seen the upturned faces of the roses."

"Why, of course you did," I said; "what else did you expect?"

"Well, it may seem very remarkable to a person who is not a member of the S.P.R., but it was not in the least what I did expect, and its effect was almost to stop my heart's beating. The moonlight and the garden and the flowers and that white figure seemed to swim round. I caught at the window-frame with one hand and covered my eyes with the other. When things seemed to steady themselves again, the vision was *gone*. Nor did it return again that night."

"Have you been taken much that way since?" I asked, rather derisively.

"Yes—pretty frequently," said Barry, with a queer smile, "as you'll presently see. The next appearance was as follows.

"When I entered the breakfast-room next morning my spirit love was there. She had on a blue cotton gown, and was chatting cheerfully to my hostess, who at once introduced me to her.

“ ‘ Miss Lasalle ! ’

‘ You may guess I held on to the table for a minute or two after that introduction.’

‘ How grossly materialistic ! ’ I said, rather piqued at not having foreseen this dénouement.

‘ Yes,’ he answered. ‘ The story’s rather more in your line now, isn’t it ? Of course I had to wait till my acquaintance with Miss Lasalle and her father ripened considerably before I could get at any explanation of that mysterious photograph. However, I got on very well with them, and before long I learned that Mrs. Suggidge’s story was correct in all particulars save one.

‘ Mrs. Lasalle’s child had been a girl, not a boy, and this girl, grown a woman, had driven from some distance to visit her mother’s grave on the day when I photographed it. She had been kneeling for some time behind the cross, and being roused from her prayer or reverie by hearing my movements, she looked over the arm. She saw my camera, and saw too that I was unaware of her presence ; so, not wishing to be seen, she bent her head again quickly. Not quickly enough, though, to escape my faithful plate. You don’t believe in fate, I know, but something of that kind was at work, I think, in those two meetings. That’s about all my story : I’m afraid it’s been rather dry.’

‘ No, by Jove,’ I said, taking up the portrait for one last look ; ‘ it’s been very interesting. But how was it—did the Real kill the Ideal ? I suppose you began to lose interest when you found it was mere flesh and blood ? ’

‘ Not altogether,’ said Barry, as the door opened. ‘ Let me introduce you to my wife.’

I looked from the pictured face to its living original.

‘ So you see,’ said Barry, as he shook hands with me at his door after a very pleasant evening, ‘ my amateur photography has done me at least one good turn.’

‘ It has,’ I said with emphasis. ‘ I shall buy a camera myself to-morrow.’

Even with This.

I STOOD to-day beside the grave of my dear old friend Paul — (his name will be known by his friends, and for those who were not his friends his name may remain unknown). The vicar read the funeral service while the birds were singing on the trees, the sun shone on the laburnum and the lilac, and from below the cliff came the roll of the waves along the shore. His remains were laid beside those of his wife, and while the words of the solemn service fell upon my ears, I was thinking how it would have fared with Paul had it not been for his marriage. It will harm no one now to tell the story of that marriage.

Paul died at the age of fifty-two, a time of life when most men look forward to many more years of successful work. There was only one reason why he should not have lived to three-score years and ten—namely, that his wife was dead. She died twelve months before him, and he could not endure life without her companionship. He looked more than fifty-two, because he had gone completely grey, and he stooped and walked slowly, as one who is drawing near to the grave. When first he met his wife, in the year 1857, he was—well, he was twenty-five years of age to begin with. It seems as if merely to be twenty-five is enough, but I suppose some other things are desirable as well. He had just been called to the Bar; he was a fellow of his college, a hard-headed reader, and an athlete, such as athletes then were. That is to say, he neither ran nor leaped, and took no heed of running or leaping, but he tugged a manful oar in his college boat, went to Switzerland after every 'long,' climbed high mountains, and made light of inaccessible peaks, and at home took great walks. He was popular because he possessed a pleasant voice, a pleasant face, and a pleasant manner; because he was not small and petty in speech or thought; and because he was strong. Nobody among undergraduates is so popular as the man who is strong. It was also known to Paul's friends that he was ambitious as well as strong. In order to further his ambitious aims, he read mathematics, and came out in the first half-dozen wranglers.

Though he had no real genius or love for that many-headed science, yet he knew that a good degree and a fellowship are good things for a barrister to begin with. They recommend a man. Further, in order to acquire facility in speaking, he spoke regularly at the Union, and learned to speak well. Whatever he attempted, he either did well or abandoned altogether.

For instance, he played racquets admirably, but would never play billiards ; he played whist well, but would not play chess ; and in conversation he spoke only about things in which he was tolerably well 'posted.' There are in every generation of undergraduates two or three men such as Paul, who have determined beforehand for themselves that they have a great career before them : it will generally be found that they are not mistaken.

I have said that in the year 1857 Paul was twenty-five years of age. It was in that year that he took the step which subsequently led to his early retirement. And it happened in this way.

In the month of September we started together upon a walking expedition. In those days we had a project for walking round the coast of Great Britain, taking a fortnight here and another there, according to season and opportunity, and reckoning that we should complete the task—allowing for sinuosities and creeks—in three hundred and seventy-three years exactly. We carried a white round pebble. At the end of each walk, we buried it and marked the place : at the beginning of a new walk we dug it up again. By this method one was quite sure of passing over the whole ground without the possibility of self-deception. We began very well, with capital weather and high spirits. On the afternoon of the third day an accident happened of a very common and uninteresting nature. Paul twisted his ankle on a loose stone. We were then about a mile and a half distant from a certain small village through which we had to pass, but we had not intended to rest a night there. When we reached it, however, the trouble of the ankle became so bad that it was absolutely necessary to stop. Fortunately we found a decent inn, with better accommodation than might have been expected. It was an old thatched and rustic village public-house, to which had been built a new modern wing containing three or four bed-rooms, a coffee-room, and a billiard-room.

After laying my man upon the sofa in the coffee-room, I went out to explore the place. It was more considerable than I had expected : there was a single long street running up a gentle hill from the sea-shore ; on the top of the hill was a church with an

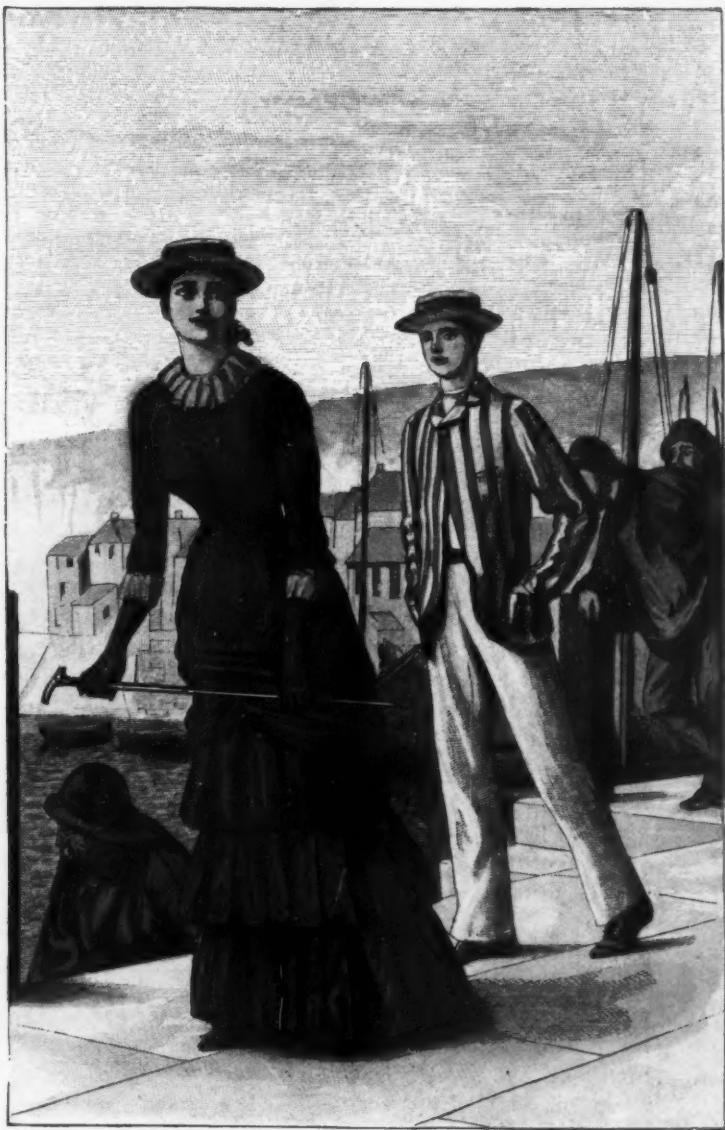
ancient square rubble tower and a square brick 'temple' of the period of George II.; beyond the church were two roads, and beside them certain villas, which looked very pretty amid the woods and trees and gardens. At the lower end of the town was the port. Here the sea runs inland and makes a little creek for the reception of a stream; they have built out a brick jetty and constructed a wharf, along which are generally lying half-a-dozen small vessels; a few boats were hauled upon the beach, with two or three fishing-smacks and a row of fisher-folk's cottages, the women sitting at work in the doors, the men leaning against posts, and the children playing barefooted on the sand. Looking up the creek, one saw trees and fields and houses behind the masts, producing effects unusual in England; you can see it on the Dart, and at Bridgwater, and on the quay at Yarmouth.

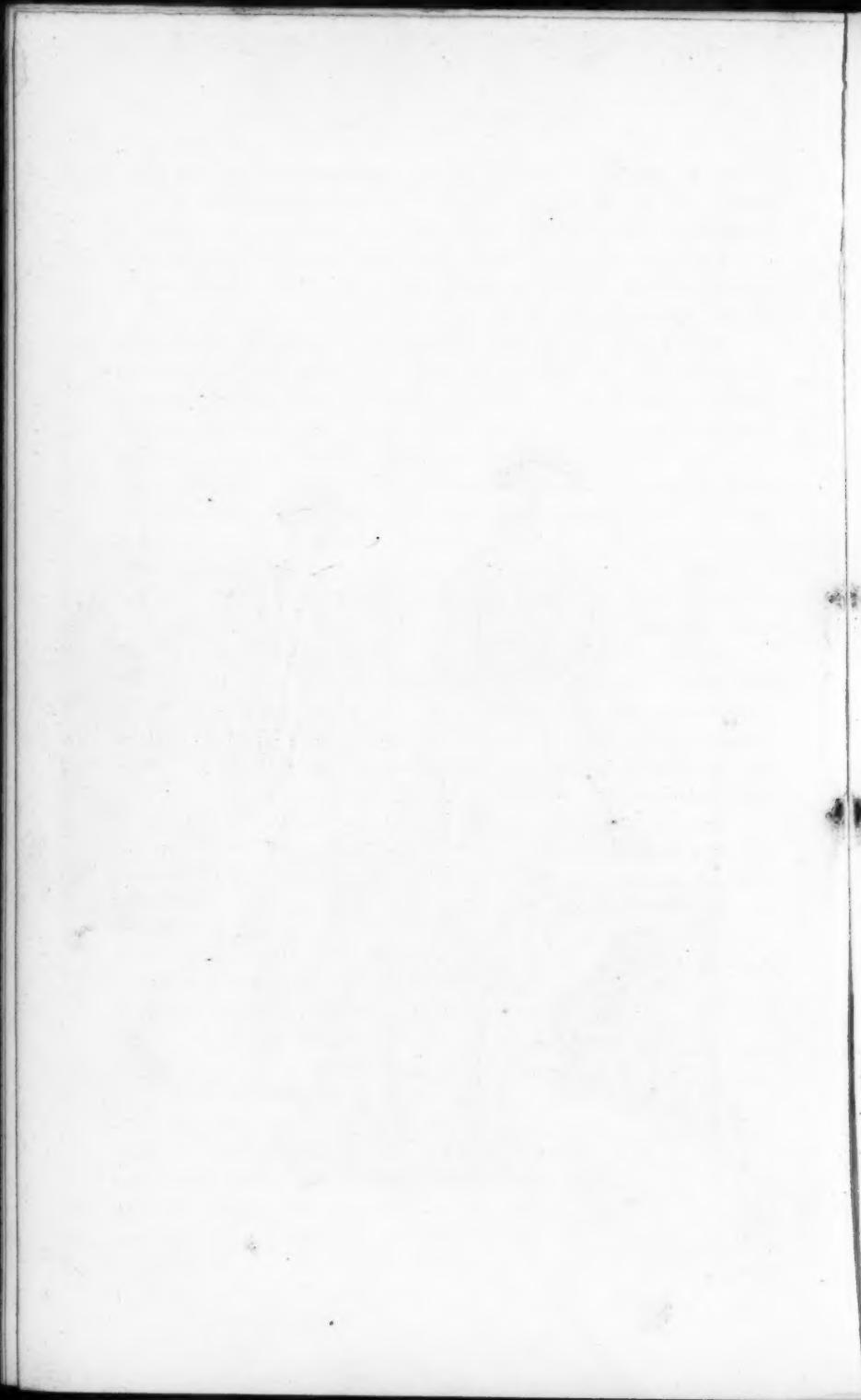
There was not much to observe. I walked to the end of the jetty, where three ancient mariners were sitting in a row, each with a pipe in his mouth. Far out to sea, one saw a steamer, low down on the horizon, the following of smoke looking as solid as the hull and many miles long; so that one wondered why the craft, with this top-heavy gear, did not capsize. There was a gentle ripple on the water and a soft westerly breeze. On the right of the creek there rose a bold headland, such as are so common on the white coasts of Albion; on the left the land was low for a mile or two, and then rose gradually, and there was a great bay with a sweep of cliff after cliff, very beautiful. As I looked there came swiftly round the headland a little boat—not a common dingy or fisherman's boat, but a miniature yacht—quite a dainty little craft, flying fore-sail and main-sail. A girl was steering her, and a boy sat beside the mast, ready to lower sail. The boat ran merrily up the creek, alongside the jetty. The boy lowered sail, unshipped mast and rudder, and tied the painter with the quickness of him who understands his work. Then both sprang out and ran up the steps of the jetty, and one of the fishermen touched his hat, and went slowly down to take the boat to her moorings. The pair were clearly brother and sister; he a lad of eighteen, she a year or two older, perhaps twenty-one. They were curiously alike, and the girl's face was her brother's, glorified. There is no other word which can express the difference between the two faces. She had the same face as her brother, but glorified. Every face, if you come to think of it, has its best and most delightful type in the womanly form: in the old days every god had a corresponding goddess, though, some-

times, so great became the admiration and love of the goddess, that the god dropped out and was forgotten. Who remembereth the male Astarte? Now, you may buy a block of marble and commission almost any sculptor to carve out of it a boy's head, beautiful, brave, and manly. But, if you want the girl's head corresponding to this, you must find out a sculptor of poetic temperament, and you will not get what you want unless you do find the right man. This girl then had the same face as her brother, but it was different. Thus, the boy's hair was light and curly, hers was darker; his eyes were a light blue, and hers a dark blue and deeper; his mouth was weak, and hers was strong; in her walk and bearing there was more strength and character than seemed to belong to her brother. All these things I did not observe at the moment when she passed quickly up the pier, but I found them out afterwards. As for her figure, she was nearly as tall as her brother, who was certainly five feet eight, and in shape she resembled the goddess Artemis, who was of thinner and slighter build and had a more slender waist than Aphroditē. Her admirers, in fact, invented the corset and the practice of tight-lacing.

The girl passed me with just the slight glance of curiosity which one bestows upon an unexpected stranger, and I presently left the pier and walked slowly back to our inn, wondering why girls so beautiful are so rarely seen in the world. Do they all live in the country and blush unseen beside the hedges, like the wood-anemones? Why, just to look upon such a face fills the mind with all kinds of sweet fancies. But she passed before me and was gone, and only the remembrance of her was left.

In the evening after dinner we took refuge in the billiard-room, as there was nothing at all in the house to read. The only occupant of the room was the young fellow whom I had seen in the boat with the extraordinarily beautiful girl. He was knocking the balls about for amusement. There was no marker. I observed that he blushed violently when I invited him to play a game—more violently, that is, than a boy of eighteen ought to blush. He accepted, however, and we played five games, Paul watching the play in a chair. Presently we began to talk about the village. The boy said that, partly because it was eight miles from a station, and partly because there were no lodgings except at the inn, visitors very rarely found their way to the place. As for society, he said, blushing crimson—we could not say why—a few people lived in the villas beyond the church outside the little town





—his own people among them; but it was a very dull and quiet place. For his own part—but here he blushed again and did not complete his sentence.

‘For your own part,’ said Paul, ‘you do not desire to hear nothing but the beating of the waves on the shore and the cry of the sea-birds all your life.’

‘And yet,’ the boy replied, with a touch of sadness in his voice, ‘I do not know how I am to get anything else. But that does not matter to you,’ he added quickly. Then, as if afraid of saying more than he desired to say, he wished us good night, and went away.

‘Why can’t he expect anything else?’ Paul asked. ‘The boy wants to go to sea, I suppose, or on the stage, or into the army, or to become a poet, or to do something which his father won’t let him do. He’s a pretty pink and white sort of boy; sometimes they turn out well, that sort of make. And he’s a gentleman. Well, I shall go and put a compress on my ankle. Help me upstairs, old man.’

He went upstairs and I returned to the coffee-room. It was then about ten o’clock. The place was so quiet and still that the silence oppressed me. There are times when one cannot bear a complete silence. I even opened the door for the purpose of hearing the low buzz of voices from the bar, where half-a-dozen men were slowly and solemnly drinking and talking.

Then I heard steps outside the house and in the hall, and a man appeared at the door. He peered round, saw me sitting beside a couple of candles, hesitated for a moment, and then came in. It was a public room, and I suppose he had a perfect right to use it if he pleased; but I resented his intrusion. When he took off his hat I perceived by the light of my two candles that he was perfectly bald, that his whiskers and eyebrows were white, that his eyes were red, his lips thick, his cheeks as fiercely red as his eyes, and his nose swollen. I declare that the very first aspect of this man made me tremble and shiver; I cannot tell why—it may have been a presentiment of mischief, yet he did no harm to me. Sometimes I have thought that this natural loathing was caused by the inexpressible wickedness of the man’s face. Why he looked so wicked I cannot tell; it may have been some evil thought lurking like a devil in his eyes. I do not know what it is that betrays the evil disposition of a man; certain I am, however, that the man’s face was altogether most remarkably evil. Now you cannot, in the coffee-room of an inn, say to a

stranger, even if he carries hoofs and a tail, 'Sir, your appearance impresses me with so unfavourable an idea of your moral character that I must request you to withdraw, or at least not to speak to me.' I did not say that to him, and he did not withdraw, but opened a conversation with me.

'I think,' he said—his voice was raspy and grating—'I think that I saw young Robert Reeve leave the inn a little while ago.'

'There was a young gentleman here,' I replied, 'who played a game of billiards with me, and is gone.'

'Yes, the same, the same. Nice boy, sir, ain't he?'

'He appears to be so.'

'Are you a friend of his—of the family, may I ask?' He leaned forward and grinned horribly. Why did he grin? 'An old friend, perhaps, of former and happier times? Yet not quite old enough, I should say—'

'I have not the pleasure of knowing them.'

'Ah!' He leaned back in his chair and breathed another sigh, apparently of satisfaction. 'Ah! A thousand pities for him, poor boy; but of course it is worse, much worse, for the girl. But you do not know the family yet. You would be interested—'

'Not at all,' I said. 'Pray do not waste village scandals upon me.'

'Village scandals? My dear sir, you are greatly mistaken—greatly mistaken. It is a world-wide—why, I could tell scandals—why, I could tell you things about this village which—'

'Good night, sir.' I interrupted his confidences, not on account of dislike to village gossip, which might be interesting, but because the fellow looked so malignant that I could no longer endure his company.

'You are wrong, sir,' he said. 'As a stranger you are wrong to go; I could have told you some very interesting things indeed about the people in this town. Mary—Mary—I say. Some more whisky, girl. Very interesting things indeed I could have told you.'

I perceived then that the old fellow had been drinking, which was perhaps the cause of his familiarity and his strange confidences. However, I left him.

In the morning, Paul's ankle was still swollen, and I agreed to leave him and go on with the walk alone. He, for his own part, thought he would send to town for some books and stay where he was. The place was quiet, the inn was comfortable, he should be

neither lonely nor dull. I thought of the boy—this Robert Reeve, if that was the name—perhaps he would turn up at the inn ; and then I thought of the girl. There was certainly one possibility which might make a stay at this place very far from dull. But I said nothing about her.

After breakfast I strapped my knapsack and started for the solitary walk of five-and-twenty miles a day for a fortnight or so. When one is young so many friends are made at every halt that there is no time to feel lonely. My way took me first over the high headland of which I have spoken. Halfway up the hill I passed, sitting on the grass, my acquaintance of the previous night. He was sober, apparently, and yet somehow he looked more malignant than before.

‘Good morning, sir,’ he said, without, apparently, bearing any malice for my abruptness of the previous evening, ‘you are off? And alone, I see. Your friend remains behind, I suppose.’

‘He remains behind.’ I pushed on, not caring to converse any longer with the man.

‘Ah! Don’t be in a hurry, my good sir. Stop half a minute now. You wouldn’t listen to me last night. Well, I forgive you ; I always forgive people ; though I do think it is a bit rude to go off to bed when a gentleman offers to tell you all there is to be told.’

‘Pardon me, you offered to tell me the scandals of the town. I am not fond of Paul Pry in a country village.’

‘There again,’ he said, ‘you do me an injury. Without intention, doubtless—without intention,’ he smiled in a ghastly way. ‘So your friend stays. It is to be hoped that young Robert Reeve, as he calls himself, will not thrust himself upon your friend. Otherwise, it will be my duty to warn your friend solemnly ; yes, though I knew young Reeve’s father at what I may call a very critical period of his life, it will be my duty to warn him.’

‘It seems to me,’ I said, with as much sternness as is possible at five-and-twenty—‘it seems to me that you are proposing to meddle in what does not belong to you.’

‘You do me another injury, young man,’ he replied, spreading out his hands. ‘You do me another injury. But I forgive you. It is from ignorance. You do not know me, indeed you do not. I forgive everybody ; I am accustomed to injury. People have all my life been resolved to injure me, who never harmed a fly—not a fly.’

I left this man and pushed on my way up the hill. Presently

I came to the top—not a very lofty eminence after all—and sat down. Below me was the little port up the creek, with the fishing boats, and, if one could have seen them, the fishermen themselves. I remember thinking that if one had to choose a profession, one might think twice about becoming a fisherman. It is, to be sure, a hard life ; a good many get drowned ; there is too much moaning of the harbour bar, and more rolling up of the night rack than is pleasant ; and fish do certainly smell ; and it is very often horribly cold at sea ; and nobody can pretend to dine in comfort in a tossing boat on a rough sea ; probably, too, no other life offers so many facilities for getting wet ; and yet, all deductions made, what other life offers so many opportunities for repose, either sitting in the boat, or leaning against a post, or standing, hands in pocket, gazing at the sky ? In London we never see the sky. We must never look up at it, for fear of being run over. Besides, fishermen wear a most convenient and picturesque costume ; a great woollen jersey, lying in thick folds and rollers several inches thick, seems, when you come to think of it, the only costume possible for all weathers, except perhaps the simple dress of John Chinaman.

While I was meditating in this foolish fashion, I became aware of a grating raspy voice.

‘ You are unjust, dear sir, you are indeed. If you knew all I know—’

Here I sprang to my feet and fairly bolted. But this dreadful-looking old person with the cringing manner, the raspy voice, and the evil eyes, left a bad impression upon me. Not as regards Paul. If anybody in the world could take care of himself, it was Paul.

Three weeks later, having forgotten this person and, indeed, the village itself, I found waiting for me, on my arrival at a certain town which was on our proposed route, a letter from Paul. It was short, and without explanation begged me to get back to him as soon as I received the letter. This request gave me an uneasy feeling.

What should Paul—Paul the Self-Reliant—want with me or with anyone ? If a man wanted counsel he generally went to Paul for it, but Paul himself asked no man’s counsel. It could not be that Paul was in a scrape of any kind.

It was not till nine in the evening that I reached the place. Paul was not in the inn. The landlord told me, however, that he was quite well, and that he was most probably at Mr. Reeve’s. This he said with a meaning smile, and added that he would be

certainly back again before eleven o'clock. I went into the coffee-room, and sat down to wait.

The old bald head again, the man with the red eyes and the white eyebrows; he followed me into the coffee-room.

'Back again, my dear sir?' he began, cheerfully. 'Back again? I hardly expected this. Yes; I saw you drive down the street. The horse and cart belong to old Poulton, the man who burned down his own hay-ricks for the insurance. The fellow who drove you is said to be reformed. A very violent character, once, and in prison many times.'

I paid no attention to these revelations. He took a chair, however, called for some brandy-and-water, and went on talking.

'Strange doings!' he said—'strange doings, since you went away. Your friend, sir—ah! poor young man. Trapped, I am afraid, trapped!' He drank half his glass of brandy-and-water and drummed the table with his fingers, repeating with great satisfaction that my poor young friend was trapped.

'Now—I grew pretty hot at this interference—if you have come here to tell me stories and made-up scandal, walk straight out of the door—or, old as you are, I shall put you out.'

'Don't be violent, young man; pray don't be violent. Why, you are like your friend—I warned him, a week ago—I thought it my duty to warn him—and what was the consequence? Language more rude than I thought possible for a barrister and a gentleman to employ.'

'I dare say you deserved it.'

'What? For warning a young man on the edge of a precipice? Oh! what a world is this! What an ungrateful world!'

'I think,' I said, 'that you are a very meddlesome and impertinent person. Why do you speak to me at all?'

'Because I *must* speak. Young man, if you have any friendship for your friend—the other young man who swears—drag him away.'

He looked and spoke so much in earnest that I began to fear there might be some danger of an unknown and unsuspected kind.

'What danger?' I asked.

'The danger'—he leaned across the table and shook a warning forefinger in my face, 'the danger of a most lamentable connection. You do not know—how should you?—the nature of this village and its residents.'

I began to wonder if the man was mad, or if there was method in his madness. ‘This place, sir, is the refuge of those who can no longer live among their fellow-men. Here, all alike have a disgraceful past and can meet on equal terms ; in fact, it would be in the highest degree unmannerly to speak of what may have happened. Some words—such as detection, punishment, justice, and the like—are never used here ; be careful not to use them.’

‘Good heavens !’

‘Why not ? People must live somewhere. Surely it is best when a man “comes out” to join a community of others who have either come out or been driven from society. Ah ! my young friend, I have now been here six months and more, and I have as yet regarded the possession of this knowledge as a sacred secret ; but to see a young gentleman trapped—I cannot longer remain silent, I cannot indeed.’

I wanted to ask him if he had recently ‘come out,’ but I forbore.

‘In the very first villa outside the town,’ this agreeable person went on, ‘there lives a lady who was once tried for her life in Scotland ; she got off because the verdict was *Not proven*. But she did it, my dear sir, she did it. I have read the evidence, and I think I may be allowed some experience in evidence. She did it.’

‘Well ?’

‘And on the other side of my house lives a man who was cashiered—drummed out of the army, sir, and he a major—for cowardice. Oh, yes ! My house is between them.’

‘And what have you done ?’ I asked impudently.

He shook his head sadly, as if I was greatly to blame for asking so indiscreet a question.

‘Opposite to us there lives an aged clergyman. Ask him—I am not a libellous person—I say, only ask him why he holds no benefice *now*—ask him that. To say of *his* neighbour that he is a fraudulent bankrupt, and lives upon the profits, would not surprise you, I suppose. And of the Honourable Mr. Arthur Mompesson, another of our neighbour residents, that he was expelled all his clubs for cheating at cards, would not strike you, perhaps, as at all an unusual incident in a gentleman’s career.’

‘But what did *you* do ?’ For the man was reeling out these accusations with a malignant joy which made one’s brain turn. ‘What is it that you have done ?’

He shook his head again.

‘And there’s another man, who made his fortune by wrecking ships, over-insuring them and then overloading them. He is a churchwarden now—Ho! ho! And as for old Reeve, as he calls himself now, who wants to throw over his old friends, refuses to speak to me if he meets me, and has forbidden me the house—why, I defended him, Sir, I defended him, and this is gratitude.’

‘You—you defended him? What were you, then?’

‘What was I, sir? I would have you to know, sir, that I was a barrister, sir, and a Queen’s Counsel, sir. What do you think of that?’

‘You were a barrister and a Queen’s Counsel. Then, why are you no longer either? What did you do?’ I asked again.

He shook his head no longer, but sprang to his feet with a fierce gesture, and for a moment I thought he would have made for me.

‘Why,’ I said, looking him steadily in the face, ‘if you are no longer a Q.C., what is it that you have done?’

He made no reply, but actually fled from the room: he ran out of it, and down the street, and I saw him no more.

At eleven Paul came home. He was evidently in a state of high excitement. ‘I sent for you,’ he said, ‘because I *must* tell some one, and I know I can trust you. Sit down and listen to me without speaking one word.’

As for the substance of his tale, it was what one might have expected. He was in love, madly in love, and with the very girl, the beautiful creature, whom I had seen on the river. Her name was Isabel. The largest and finest house in the place belonged to her father, who was, it appeared, a man of considerable wealth. So far all seemed plain and easy sailing.

‘You love her, Paul,’ I said. ‘No occasion to repeat it. And—if one may have the impertinence to ask—does the young lady—’

‘She refuses me,’ he replied. All this time he had been walking about the room in a violent agitation. ‘She refuses me.’

‘Refuses you?’ At twenty-five one knows little about women, but one thing everybody knows—that when a clever, handsome, and in every way eligible young man makes love to a girl—especially to a girl in a dull country place—his chances of refusal are not—well—not equal to the chances of acceptance. You can’t go beyond a man who is a gentleman, clever, hard-working,

ambitious, and of good heart. They don't make young men any better than that. 'Refused you, Paul ?'

'Refused me. Mind, there is a reason. The dear girl owned to-day that if it were not for this reason—she—she——' Here he choked.

'Is the reason insurmountable ?'

'Oh !' he replied. 'The reason is unreasonable ; it is a mere trick of the brain ; it matters really nothing. I cannot tell you, though she has told me the whole, God bless her ! and it tore her heart to tell it. She told me the whole story two days ago. I wrote to you at once, because I felt that I must speak to some one or die. Yet I cannot tell you all of it—only this : there is upon her past a cloud. Yes, I admit it is a very dreadful cloud. Through no fault of her own—none, mind. No one can blame her in the least ; no one would dare to throw it in her teeth. By Heaven ! I would kill such a man where he stood. It is on account of this cloud that she refuses. She says that she will never consent to bring her burden of shame to weigh down the life of a man she loved. O Isabel ! my dear !——' Here again he choked.

'Yet, Paul, if you would take her—even with this—this——'

'Even with this !' he said solemnly. 'Why it would be nothing in the world to me ; less than nothing ; just a secret between husband and wife ; just a painful reminiscence of the past, never to be mentioned between us.'

'Is there,' I asked, 'anyone who knows the secret ?'

'Her brother knows, of course, poor fellow ! Well for him if he did not know, because the knowledge of it will poison his life wherever he goes. I am sorry, truly sorry, for the boy. But as for Isabel, I can take her away from all of it.'

'And does no one else know ?'

'There is a dreadful man who lives here—a most horrible beast. I threatened to cowhide him last week because he threw out hints that he knew something about the previous history of this family not altogether to their credit. He is a man named Brundish ; he was formerly, it appears, in very good practice at the Bar, and had taken silk, was a Q.C., and a bencher of Lincoln's Inn, and was then found out to have appropriated, embezzled, or made away with certain trust-moneys. This was a horrible scandal, and they disbarred and disbarred him. He is a man of infamous private character, and drinks, I believe. Pro-

bably he will drink himself into the grave before long. I am afraid he knows something, but I do not know how much. What does that creature signify ?'

I thought it unnecessary to tell Paul of my experience with Mr. Brundish ; but I felt relieved to think that he had not told me more. We went on talking of the young lady's perfections. In fact we talked half through the night.

The next morning he took me to the house. It was a beautiful villa, furnished with admirable taste, heaped with books, pictures, and all kinds of pretty things. Isabel herself—I have always called her, by gracious permission, by her Christian name—received us, and presently her brother joined us. There was some constraint upon the whole party, which was natural under the circumstances, and I was glad when we all went out together and climbed to the top of the headland. Here, presently, I found myself—whether by accident or design I know not—standing alone with Isabel, the other two slowly going on before us down the hill. She looked grave and anxious, her cheek rather pale ; I knew that her mind was full of her lover and her refusal. I had no right to speak, yet I did speak to her about it. First, I told her what Paul had told me, that he loved her and that she would not accept him, for a reason.

‘ Did he tell you the reason ? ’ she asked, her cheek flushing suddenly.

‘ No ; only in general terms. There is a cloud upon some part of your past.’

‘ A cloud indeed,’ she replied.

‘ Which would not in any way affect the life of the man you married.’

‘ But it would,’ she said ; ‘ oh ! it would. You do not know what it is, or you would say that I am right.’

‘ Nay, I cannot think, Miss Reeve, that you are right, for you make the man who loves you—the best man in the world—you do not know what a clever, brave, and good-hearted man he is—you make him wretched when you might make him happy.’ And so I continued, she shaking her head, though the tears came into her eyes, and murmuring :

‘ Oh ! I refuse him because I would not make him unhappy.’

Then I said it all over again. The only way to agree with a woman, especially with a woman who in her heart wishes to be convinced, is to repeat your proposition until she gets it well into

her head. I said that, in the first place, nobody would know the thing which she was afraid would injure Paul ; and secondly, that if all the world knew it, nobody would care ; that in all cases of this kind the real injury to one was in suspicion that there was injury ; that it was like a man's being ashamed of low origin, a thing which could not be prevented, and which no one, certainly, would ever cast in a man's teeth. Then I begged her to put this consideration out of her mind altogether, and, if she could, to make Paul happy.

She shook her head with less firmness than before, and I saw that she was shaken. When a lovely woman has thoroughly made up her mind, she does not keep on crying. Then we descended the hill, and found Paul and Robert in the boat. I remember that we went sailing in the pretty little boat. I do not know where, or whither, or for how long. I was thinking over the position of things, and admiring the sight of a man desperately in love and a girl ready to receive his homage but for one thing that seemed to stand in the way. Yet in every look, and in every gesture, she said, so plainly that all could read,

Ask me no more, for at a touch I yield :
Ask me no more.

When we walked back to the house the boy came with me, and Paul walked beside Isabel.

‘I wish it may come off,’ he said, blushing as usual. ‘I say—I know I can talk freely with you, because Paul says so. He has told you something about us—hasn’t he ? Not much, he says, but I dare say it is quite enough. Isabel wrote it all down, so that he should not think he had been deceived—all, she says—everything. Good God !’ here he gasped. ‘If Paul likes to show it to you, he may. But I hope he will not. As for me, I am done for ; I can do nothing, the history is round my neck like a millstone ; I must sit in the background all my life, and make myself as little conspicuous as I can. I cannot go into the army or the university. I have not been to a public school. I have no friends and I can make none. I can never marry.’ Here he stopped for a while, and walked on at a great rate, swinging his arms.

‘As for Isabel,’ he went on, ‘it really cannot matter to her when once she is married. Paul will take her away : no one will trouble their heads to ask who she was. She swears that nothing would ever induce her to spoil a man’s life, but I don’t think it

would hurt his career. Let Paul persevere ; if she can once be got to think that it will not do him mischief, I think she will give in. And, oh ! I cannot bear to think that she should stay on here, wasted, her life spoiled ; living in vain.'

She had already given in, though we did not know it. The word was spoken, and she was promised. I saw it in her blushing face and softened eyes, when we reached the house : I saw it in Paul's absurdly triumphant air when we walked away.

'It is settled,' he said, pressing my arm. 'She has accepted me. My dear boy ! I am the happiest man in the world.'

He went on to explain at great length how very happy he was already, and how very much happier he meant to be in the immediate future. They were to be married at once—in a few weeks ; there was no need to wait ; and so on. Meantime there was a small dinner-party at the house that evening, and I was invited by Isabel.

In the nature of things, it was impossible that I could avoid being interested not only in the love-affair of my friend, and that most beautiful girl, Isabel, but also in her father. From Paul I learned that Something had been done which must be concealed ; from the boy, that Something had been done which would make it impossible for him to go into any kind of public life ; from the wicked old man, Mr. Brundish, that he had himself 'defended' the father of this interesting pair at a critical juncture, when he himself had been a Q.C. All this, put together, did not inform one of much ; yet it made me curious, not so much to know more, as to see, in the flesh, the man who had caused this terrible cloud to hang over his children's lives, the man who had 'done something.'

Well, I was introduced to him : I saw him ; he was a singularly handsome man, portly, dignified, well dressed, and possessed of a manner perfectly charming ; not only at ease with himself, but able to set his guests at their ease. He was apparently about sixty years of age ; his abundant hair was of a splendid creamy white ; his features were sharp and clear ; his eyes singularly bright—they were of a deep blue, like those of his daughter ; he not only looked, but he was, a perfectly polished and delightful man. At the very sight of him, all the injurious suspicion and doubts one had entertained of him vanished ; as he talked, one was lifted out of oneself and carried into circles and among people one had never thought to know. Perhaps he talked too continuously, but

nobody else present could have talked half so well, and I, for one, was content to listen. He seemed to know, or to have met,—because he did not profess friendship with any of them—all the great men of the day; he knew the secret history of everything that had taken place ten, twenty, thirty years before—such as the Reform Bill of 1832, or the great railway bubble of 1846; he knew the great men of the City; he knew, as well, the best literary men and artists of the day, and even the great statesmen. He talked, in fact, through the whole dinner, and we neither grew tired of him, nor did the dinner languish.

There were six or seven guests, besides Paul and myself; it was an excellent dinner, admirably served, and with admirable wine. At first I gave myself up entirely to the enjoyment of the delightful talk, and thought of nothing else. But a strange thing happened: in the very middle of the dinner I caught a sharp and curiously suggestive glance from Isabel. It seemed to ask me what I thought, now, of her father, and if I really knew that—

I felt myself blushing like her brother, and my mind suddenly went back to what I had heard. Of what nature was the ‘cloud’? Had the ex-Q.C. really defended our host? and if so, on what occasion? And all the other scandalous statements returned to my brain: why had the venerable clergyman opposite to me no longer a cure of souls? Why had the gallant major next to him left the army? Was it true that the Honourable Arthur Mompesson had been expelled his club for cheating at cards? And this middle-aged lady, whom I had taken in to dinner, could she really have poisoned her lover? And while I pondered these things our host’s pleasant genial voice went flowing on, so that one felt the strangest incongruity between these absurd questions and the place, the talk, and the people.

Three weeks later the pair were quietly married, without any party, bridesmaids, or ceremony at all. What Paul said to Isabel’s father I know not, but at the wedding the old man seemed strangely shaken and agitated, trembling at every footfall. He had become aged, one knew not why. The bride and bridegroom drove from the church to the nearest station. Mr. Reeve went home, and I went back to the inn. I found there the man Brundish, who had been drinking already, though it was not yet noon.

‘I told the old man I would interrupt the ceremony,’ he said with a grin, ‘and make him marry the girl under her true name,

but he begged me not. I am to dine with him to-night instead. Ha! now that the girl is gone, he says, he does not care who comes to his house. Wanted to keep his own children from their father's old friends, you see. There's gratitude! Why, who defended him? Who made such a speech that all England rang with it—eh?

'Well,' I said, 'now that Mr. Reeve's daughter has married, you have done with her at any rate, and with me, too.'

'I don't know, young man, I don't know,' he replied. 'I am, it is true, a forgiving person, which is lucky for the happy bridegroom. But then he once shook a cane over my shoulders. I don't know if I have done with them. And I wasn't good enough to be invited to the house. Respectable company you met there, wasn't it? The man drummed out of his regiment; the man expelled from the clubs; the woman tried—'

'Go to the devil!' I said, and left him.

A month or two later I heard from Paul that his father-in-law had been found dead in his bed. It appeared that he had no money of his own, but was living on his late wife's fortune, which had been settled upon herself, and was held in trust. The share of it which now came to Isabel put the newly-married pair at once into a position of great material comfort, if not wealth. But Paul was already making way in his profession.

'I must be a judge by forty-five,' he said to me, laughing; 'otherwise I shall think that I have failed.'

'And then, Paul?' asked Isabel.

'Then I must be made Lord Chancellor, and I shall pass great measures for the law of the land, and shall become immortal.'

I never knew any couple so entirely happy as they were during the first twelve months of their marriage. They had very few friends, and these were all Paul's own friends; they lived on Campden Hill—remember that it was long before Campden Hill was covered with houses—and they were just as selfishly and as completely happy as love could make them. Gradually the pensive and troubled look vanished from Isabel's eyes: the 'Cloud,' the 'Thing,' the Secret, whatever it had been, was wholly put away and forgotten. As for me, I sometimes thought of it involuntarily. Was the malignant old man truthful in his account of the village and its residents? Could they really be all of them outcasts by reason of having been found out in something disgraceful? Had Isabel's father really been 'defended' by the

man Brundish in a speech that made all England ring? One would not pry into the matter, but the doubt remained which it was impossible to kill. In Isabel's society, however, it vanished completely. She was one of those rare women whose friendship is a great possession for a man, and whose love is a gift of the gods; a woman whom one regarded with a daily increasing respect and admiration; a woman to whom goodness of all kinds came by nature.

Isabel's brother came to town soon after his father's death, and called upon me.

'I have made up my mind,' he said to me soon after his sister's marriage, 'what I shall do. So long as I remain in this country, Isabel will always have somebody to remind her of the past. If I once go away she will belong entirely to her husband. While I am here I shall always be in terror of the Thing being found out. I shall go away, then, and travel. After a year or two I shall convey to Isabel the news that I am dead. Then she will have broken altogether with the past. I shall settle down somewhere, perhaps, some day. I am not sure where or when, and if I am quite sure that I can never be identified, I shall marry, perhaps. But never, never will I come back to England.' So we shook hands and we parted. Six months afterwards there came a note to Isabel in pencil from her brother, saying that he was dying of fever on the African coast, and that the letter would be sent on after his death. Isabel wept over the letter, but she dried her tears soon, and I think it was better that the last link which reminded her of the shame of her childhood should have been broken.

As for their happiness, however, it was rudely shaken.

One day, Paul, the junior counsel in a case of no apparent importance, found himself unexpectedly called upon to maintain a legal position against the opinion of the Court; he displayed, in his argument, so much ability and knowledge of the law as to call forth an expression of admiration from the judge himself. I was myself present in my quality of briefless barrister. On the termination of the case we came out, and stood for a few minutes talking over the point which had been raised. Paul's senior joined us, and congratulated him, prophesying that his table would never be without briefs after that morning's work. Others came to shake hands with him, and there was quite a little scene of congratulation and triumph. In the midst of our talk I saw, bearing

straight down upon us, with the evident intention of speaking, no other than that terrible ex-Q.C. He was clearly half-drunk. One of the men among us whispered in disgust: 'Good heavens! here's that miserable man Brundish!' Everybody stood aside to make way for him, as one makes way for a leper. Worse than a leper, in the courts of Lincoln's Inn, is a man who has been disbarred. As well should a man who has been stripped of his commission and drummed out of his regiment for cowardice, show himself again upon parade.

This man, then, with a half-drunken laugh, walked straight to Paul and held out his hand.

'How are you, Paul, my boy?' he cried, addressing him independently by his Christian name; 'Isabel quite well?'

Paul turned perfectly white. 'How dare you,' he cried, 'how dare you speak to me? How dare you address me by my Christian name?'

'How dare I? Ho! ho! Not use his Christian name to the man who married my dear old friend's only daughter? How do you do, Sir John?' He addressed one of the group, a well-known counsel of very high standing and ex-Solicitor-General, who made no reply. 'Gentlemen, you know me, all of you. I have been in Court to-day, and I declare I never heard a better argument than my young friend's here. Why, I never put a point better myself.'

'Your friend! Yours!' cried Paul with a gesture of loathing.

'Come, come!' cried the man. 'This is rather too much. Why, Paul, you forget that you married the only daughter of my old friend, Sir Robert Reeve Byrne, baronet, whom I defended. You remember my famous defence, gentlemen. I am sure it nearly pulled him through, but not quite, for he got his five years' penal servitude.'

Then there was a dead silence, and nobody dared to look at his neighbour. As for me, I understood it all. The case of Sir Robert Byrne was a *cause célèbre*. He had been, I remembered, defended by Mr. Brundish, Q.C., with marvellous skill and ingenuity. My delightful host was, then, no other than that famous baronet, then! and the rest of his guests—were they also what the ex-Q.C. had described them?

Paul recovered himself. 'It is quite true,' he said proudly, 'I married the daughter of Sir Robert Byrne, but this man I know nothing of, except that he is a rogue.'

Mr. Brundish looked round him; he saw on every face loathing clearly written. Half-drunk though he was, he was cowed. He said no more, but slunk away.

It was Sir John himself who laid his hand upon Paul's shoulder and said, kindly, 'We are all sorry you should have been troubled by this scoundrel, whom once I called my friend. As for your private affairs—but of them we need not speak.'

They all murmured something, the group broke up, and I took Paul by the arm and walked with him to his chambers. He threw his papers upon the table, and sank into a chair.

'It is all over,' he groaned; 'my career is finished.'

'Paul, this is absurd.'

'No,' he said. 'I have already made up my mind what will happen. These men are my private friends—they are part of our social circle; for Isabel, poor child, had no friends of her own. They are good fellows, and at first they will say that it doesn't make any difference, and think it too. But then, you see, there are the women. They will resent the thing, and show their resentment, too. Isabel must be spared this, at any cost. Go away now, my dear fellow, and leave me to think.'

'For heaven's sake, Paul,' I said, 'do nothing rash. Think of your profession first.'

'No,' he replied. 'Isabel must be first thought of.'

I lingered awhile, unwilling to leave him.

'Now you know all,' he said. 'It is something like a cloud, isn't it?'

'Is it possible that the courtly and polished——?'

'Quite possible. Sometimes I tried to think what he would look like in prison dress, but I never could. There was another side to him, though. I saw it on the day when I asked him for his daughter. 'Do you,' he said, 'know the story of my past?' I assured him that he need not open a painful chapter, because I knew everything. And then—then he broke down, burst into a fit of weeping like any woman, and thanked God solemnly that I had come to take his daughter away from him. 'For myself,' he said, 'I suppose I am sorry. That matters nothing. But for my children's sake, and especially for my daughter's sake, I am—sometimes I am mad.' I think that when he was left alone after our marriage he was really mad, and I am nearly sure that he killed himself. However, that is done with. Isabel must not know what has happened. And she must not be made to suspect

that our friends, her new friends, know her secret. Women are not always considerate towards each other. I must think—I must think what is best to do.'

Next morning, I was not surprised to receive a note from Isabel. She said that her husband was suddenly prostrated with some kind of nervous breakdown, though he looked very well, and that the doctor ordered him to give up all work, break off all engagements, and go away for three months at least. They were going the same day.

The three months became six, and the six became twelve: they were travelling about in unfrequented places, where Paul's health would not suffer from noise and talk of travellers: they stayed only in towns where there were no English residents, and so on. Then Paul wrote to me that he had given up his chambers and bought a cottage in the country, where he proposed to stay, his health, he said, being too wretched to think of his practising any more.

I made many visits to the cottage. It was three or four miles from any village or house. It was on the seaside, and they had a boat. They had no children, and the only people who ever visited them were the family of the nearest clergyman, who came often to them. Isabel was their friend, unpaid governess, adviser, everything.

Remark, here, a very strange thing. This man, my friend Paul, to whom at the outset life without success would have seemed intolerable, who gave up the most promising prospects solely on his wife's account, who was endowed with every quality which success requires, was perfectly happy in this obscure retreat. He wanted no other kind of life: to sail in his boat, to wander on the sands, to meditate in his garden, always with Isabel beside him, was enough for him. His love for Isabel was absorbing and sufficient for both. Other married people continue to pay each other the attentions of their first love; but this pair seemed to live wholly for each other. As for me, who knew their secret, it seemed to me as if Paul spent his life in a perpetual care to ward off from his wife the danger of being reminded of that dreadful story. It had destroyed his career—that mattered nothing. It had driven him from the world—that mattered nothing, provided his wife was never reminded of it, never made to feel it. Needs must that so terrible a thing should bring a burden and a curse upon the children—Paul accepted it and bore the burden without a murmur or a sigh. And as they lived together among books, and nourishing thoughts sacred and

lofty, their home became as a church in which one might fitly meditate, and the conversation was unlike what one heard outside.

They lived in this way for five-and-twenty years. Then the greatest possible misfortune fell upon Paul. For Isabel caught a fever and died. Then Paul began to break up. He was only just past fifty, and should have been in the vigorous enjoyment of his manhood; but he began to fail. In the last months of his life I stayed a great deal with him, and he talked freely about his old ambitions and their sudden end.

‘I am sure,’ he said, ‘that I did right in giving all up. Sooner or later Isabel would have found out—would have been made to feel, somehow—that other people knew the truth. In such a case the only safety lies in flight.’

‘But if you had stayed, your own career was certain.’

‘Perhaps: with the explanation, whenever my name was mentioned, “You know, I suppose, that he married Sir Robert Byrne’s daughter.” And she would have heard it.’

‘Tell me,’ I said, ‘who were the residents of the village—the people we met at dinner—’

‘I do not know. Why do you ask?’

Evidently Isabel knew nothing of them. Perhaps, after all, the wicked old man lied about them.

‘I am glad to think,’ Paul went on, ‘that we never met any of them afterwards, because perhaps they knew. Thank God! never, never for a moment after the marriage did Isabel feel that her father’s sins were visited upon her.’

‘Why, Paul,’ I said, ‘they were; but you shifted the burden to your own shoulders and bore it for her. Did Isabel ever learn why you left London?’

‘No, she never knew and she never suspected. The man, Brundish, died a very little while after—of drink, I believe.’

‘And you never regretted all that you lost?’

‘Never—not for a moment. What is it that I gave up for Isabel’s sake? Why, she has done far, far more for me than I ever did for her. There is something better than ambition, my friend. Isabel gave me that, in return for the burden which, as you say, I shifted to my own shoulders. It pleases me now to think of what I might have become; but if all were to be done over again, I would have it as it has been.’

What it was that Isabel gave him and did for him I do not know, for I did not ask, and now I shall never learn, because he is dead.

The Lone Glen.

FAR up among the distant mountains, 'across their uttermost purple rim,' and under the deep shadows thrown by the highest peak of all the forest ground, there is hid a sharp and precipitous ravine or corrie, called by the Highlanders, from its rare desolateness and lack of life, the 'Lone Glen.'

The circling sweep of gloomy crags that close in upon the near horizon seem to cut off all suggestion of an outer world. In it are recesses so black and deep that under the full glow of the August sun there still lie scattered patches of the winter snows. The ruddy glare at midday, the cool white snow-wreaths, and the black cavernous stretches of that far-off corrie, form a picture full of the finest contrasts for the few that pass that way.

But in the hot autumn of 1876 our own object in so often seeking the wild remoteness of that hidden glen was rather the chance of sport than the love of scenery. In the sultry weather that then held Scotland for three weeks under its scorching breath it was the only corrie within our forest marches where deer would lie. During that intense heat the stags lay motionless, except at nightfall, in one unmolested herd upon the highest peaks of Lochnagar. In the Royal forest the now lamented John Brown apparently was not upon the stalk, nor did any German 'Serenity' appear to mar the peace of the deer.

Day after day, faint but pursuing, we toiled to the head of our ground, to look if haply one stag at least had not wandered back to the home of his fathers, to his own familiar feeding-ground. But day after day the telescope would give no glimpse of deer, save perhaps a few hinds with their calves, lying in the black shadows thrown by the scarped rocks of that wild glen. But let the glass only be turned on to the tops of Lochnagar, and we could see great stags by the hundred lying still and quiet on those heights where yet cool breezes fanned the flies away. On our own ground for nearly a month we never saw a stag of the most innocently juvenile and shabbily antlered description.

But a day came at last, as days do come to any man who will

wait, which seemed likely to make us forget those tantalising visions on the neighbouring forest. The morning broke no cooler than before, and under the fierce heat at mid-day the myriad voices of nature seemed to quail and grow dumb. It was a day when the leap of a trout in the burn beside the path, or the weird cry of the uneasy curlew overhead, made the traveller start, for all around was so intensely still. Yet Duncan, the worthy stalker, would have no man despair, and day after day persisted that the Lone Glen would harbour heavy deer once more. If it was unkindly suggested to him that each succeeding day proved him a poorer prophet than the one that had gone before, he would screw up his weather-beaten features into an expression of preternatural sanctimoniousness, and reply, 'Aweel, it's the way of this world that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But I'm thinking the deer's there any way, and how shall we get what few chances there are if we will not work for them ?'

It was wellnigh two o'clock before we had spied our way to the topmost crags of Craignahellach (*Anglicè*, the Maiden's Rock), the big hill that overlooked the Lone Glen. But the distance was eleven miles, and the weather was not such as to make us inclined to emulate Weston on the road. But at last we were on the very top, and flung ourselves with a sigh of relief upon the unfriendly masses of shale and shingle that lay on the rugged mountain's side. Far below us stretched the corrie we had come so far to seek, but even Duncan rubbed his face meditatively with a red and yellow cotton handkerchief before he surveyed the prospect with his glass. It needed no glass, however, to show us a small herd lying just above the snow, but one look through the telescope proclaimed them hinds and calves. Nothing else was to be discovered by the most liberal use of the glasses, and we soon turned to the lunch in our pockets with a poor appetite and a determination never to follow Duncan's lead again.

Half an hour later we had lighted our pipes, and were leisurely glassing the hinds, chiefly from a natural history or zoological point of view, to watch their innocent or frolicsome movements while all unsuspicuous of danger, when I saw what seemed to be a white stick of burnt or withered heather beside them violently agitated, as though by a passing gust of wind.

'What's up now ?' I cried. 'Is there a breeze springing up on this sweltering day in the corrie yonder such as would blow the heather about like that ?' Duncan looked up at my exclamation,

and his fine keen eyes grew round and large as he stretched his hand out to his glass and cried out after one moment's inspection, 'That's not heather at all. That's a stag. Just see him now as he rises.' And by the time I had the glass once more applied to my eye a 'royal' stag was in the view, coming out of a small gully which had hitherto concealed all but the tips of his horns from sight as he lay. What I had mistaken for burnt heather was the points of his antlers fresh from the velvet, and shining like ivory in the sun. He had one of the most symmetrical and widest heads that it has ever been my lot to see, and such a prize would make up for long disappointment.

Duncan, though he allowed that the stag was in a rare good place for a stalk, was not going to allow himself to be betrayed into any outward display of emotion, and, now that matters unexpectedly stood upon so good a footing, was inclined to throw cold water upon the generous ardour of others. 'Aweel, the stag's there to-day. But we haven't got him yet, and it's awful likely a grouse may be, or the De'il himself, will start the deer before we can open fire upon him.'

Melancholy as these forebodings might sound, he lost no time in proceeding to action, for he swung the rifles on to his shoulder, and started on the stalk at once. We made a good *détour* to have the wind in the most favourable quarter for our approach, but it was all downhill work, and when first seen the stag was barely a mile and a half away. So we were soon surveying the monarch of the glen from a mighty convenient knoll that lay 300 yards from him. His grand yellow body glistened in the sun, and the great stretch of horn shone white. A lazier, a more complacent, and a happier beast I never hope to see. He lay right over on his side in some wet black peat, which on so hot a day he evidently found most grateful to his portly frame. All sentinel work he left to the hinds about him, and he never once turned his head while the murderous ambuscade were quietly watching only just out of shooting distance. The hinds were but few in number, and were so near to their lord and master that they formed no impassable or even dangerous outpicket upon our road: if we were once within range of them, we could 'open fire' (as Duncan always phrases it) upon the stag as well.

As we slipped cautiously down from the rocks above him, slowly, lest some awkward movement should betray us to the ever-watchful hinds, we came below the line of a small ridge that hid

us for the moment from the deer. Once on the top of that ridge and again in sight of the herd, we should be not one hundred yards away from the stag. Duncan, in the dip of the hollow, gave a most meaning look over his shoulder, and touched the handle of the hunting-knife that lay in his waistband with a horrid significance.

‘Poor beastie!’ he muttered, yet with a chastened resignation in his tone, ‘there’s no chance for him now whatever. But he’ll look grand strung up in the larder at the Lodge’—a poor consolation for his manes, should they be passing that way, to view his ignominious suspension from the beams. Perhaps no few seconds ever seemed longer than those in which we were laboriously squirming and wriggling upwards to the top of this last intervening ridge, with our hearts in our mouths, and our fore-fingers playing with the trigger-guards, prepared to shoot at once, should the too hasty projection of a stalking cap put the deer away. But the top was gained at last, and there, inch by inch, amid the waving grasses, and the tufts of heather, our heads rose synchronous, till we could command a full view of the fateful gully just below.

There was not a single deer to be seen anywhere! One hasty glance all around to assure poor Duncan that his senses in general, and more particularly his eyesight, had not all deserted him, and then there rose up upon the sultry air a howl of irrepressible anguish, the long-corked-up effervescence of three weeks of silent disappointment. The next few hurried words he said, though uttered indeed in the Gaelic tongue, could readily be explained to a mind of the meanest capacity. But as some great sayings will not admit of translation, being either too idiomatic or too delicate to bear the rude process of transplanting, so we consider it hardly desirable to reproduce the full force of the language that now burst from that disgusted Highlander’s lips.

But what could have startled the deer? Even as his utterance rose strident on the nearer air, on the far horizon across the corrie there loomed large and clear an apparition which for one moment I privately took to be ‘Old Bogie’ himself, responsive to Duncan’s blasphemous calls, but a moment later it resolved itself before our awe-struck gaze into the unexpected framework of a large white parasol, underneath which there rose up, slowly and by jerks, a stout old lady wiping the perspiration from her dewy brow. Another figure, and yet another, till I should judge there were

nearly twelve upon that barren skyline. The party, on sighting us, came hurriedly forward with profuse manifestations of delight, and of having something of the utmost importance to communicate. As Duncan proceeded to shut up his now useless glass, an operation which he performed with unusual care and deliberation, taking it joint by joint as though it were some fragile instrument that rude handling would inevitably destroy, a smile of malicious amusement came over a face that was otherwise full of the most unmitigated disgust, as he groaned out, 'The Lord save us ! did ye ever see the like o' that on the forest ? It's just Piccadilly the day ! Braemar Gathering is nothing to be compared with this.'

Onward came the unwelcome band of tourists in happy unconsciousness. ['Ah, Diamond ! Diamond ! thou little knowest the mischief thou hast done.] The stout lady, though manifestly sore let and hindered by the roughness of the intervening country, maintained her pride of place, and was the first to bear down upon our expectant group. 'Dear me !' she cried, when at last within hail, 'this is indeed interesting. To think of our having the luck to fall in with a real hunting party ! It only wanted so novel an experience to make our day's outing complete. And we have news for you that I am sure will gladden your sporting souls. We have just seen a tremendous stag (at least I am sure it must have been a stag, it was so large, you know). It was tearing down the hill as fast as it could go. I don't know what could possibly have alarmed it. But I have no doubt, if you hurry on, that you will catch it soon.'

So far this pleasant female, and then fortunately gasped for breath. An equally stout and elderly gentleman in spectacles, with no collar and a wideawake hat, who was evidently all impatience to take up the tale, next opened fire upon our defenceless position. The utterances of the party were all so rapid and voluble that I could only occasionally edge in sideways a murmur of assent or disagreement, while Duncan never once looked up from the heather, but gently rocked himself to and fro in an agony of subdued despair.

'Allow me,' said that middle-aged and collarless tourist, commencing his innings with gusto, while his wife fanned her brows with a handkerchief and shifted the angle of her parasol—'allow me—Mrs. Octavius Brown, my wife ;'—and then (plunging headlong *in medias res*) : 'I am so glad to have met a kindred spirit in these seemingly untenanted wilds. It does indeed give

a finishing touch to my satisfaction to find an intelligent stranger to whom I can communicate the tidings of my remarkable botanical discovery upon these mountains. Our guide-book did, indeed, tell us that on one or two of these hills it is possible to find that plant, elsewhere unknown in the British Islands. I allude to the Alpine Gentian, or, as I would prefer to phrase it, accepting the nomenclature of my great predecessor Linnæus, the *Gentiana nivalis*. I confess that I was, alas! somewhat dubious of the aforesaid guide-book's veracity; but *here* (producing a very humble and dejected-looking flower, and beaming all over with a tell-tale joy) is the object of our search. Pray examine it carefully. For my own part I have not the slightest hesitation in pronouncing it the genuine article.'

This was too much for Duncan; it was the last straw. When he thought of the stag that he had lost by the innocent appearance of these self-satisfied tourists in the Lone Glen, and then saw a decrepit-looking 'specimen' held up for inspection, as equally deserving of enthusiasm and congratulation, he could no longer restrain his rage. He jumped up all of a sudden from the heather, seized me by the shoulder as I was advancing to take the plant from the hand of the excited botanist, and began hauling me *sans façon* down the hill towards home: 'Come awa', mon. Dinna ye stand here glowering at that misguidit auld fool (he used a far worse word) wi' his bundle of withering weeds, but just come hame wi' me. The stalking's played out, if we're to have the likes of them trapesing all over the ground without ever saying by your leave or with your leave, and as bold as them that has paid a long price for their divairson.' And he actually did succeed in cutting that remarkable interview on the skyline short by withdrawing me thus abruptly from the midst. To this day we can well imagine the open-mouthed amazement of the innocent intruders, as the sportsmen rapidly receded from their view homewards, instead of carrying out Mrs. Octavius Brown's suggestion and overtaking the frightened stag by mere swiftness of foot.

Other stags have wandered since within our marches, but we have never seen that royal hart again. Deer are but timorous creatures at best, and it is readily conceivable that the vision of that white parasol upon the neighbouring skyline gave the poor beast's nerves a shock from which he never rallied.

E. LENNOX PEEL.

Royal Love.

BY WILKIE COLLINS.

[The Right of Translation is Reserved.]

PERSONS OF THE STORY.

GERMANS:

The Prince. The Princess. The Baroness.

FRENCH:

The Prima Donna.

ENGLISH:

The Diplomatist. The Doctor.

I.

THE day before I left London, to occupy the post of second secretary of legation at a small German Court, I took leave of my excellent French singing-master, Monsieur Bonnefoy, and of his young and pretty daughter named Jeanne.

Our farewell interview was saddened by family anxieties. Monsieur Bonnefoy's elder brother, known in the household as Uncle David, had been recently summoned to Paris by his republican associates. His relations in London (whether reasonably or not, I am unable to say) were in some fear of the political consequences that might follow.

At parting, I made Mademoiselle Jeanne a present in the shape of a plain gold brooch. For some time past, I had taken my lessons at Monsieur Bonnefoy's house; his daughter and I often sang together under his direction. Seeing much of Jeanne, under these circumstances, the little gift that I had offered to her was only the natural expression of a true interest in her welfare. Idle rumour asserted—quite falsely—that I was in love with her. I was sincerely the young lady's friend: no more, no less.

Having alluded to my lessons in singing, it may not be out of place to mention the circumstances under which I became

Monsieur Bonnefoy's pupil, and to allude to the change in my life that followed in due course of time.

Our family property—excepting the sum of five thousand pounds left to me by my mother—is landed property, strictly entailed. The estates were inherited by my only brother, Lord Medhurst: the kindest, the best, and, I grieve to say it, the unhappiest of men. He lived separated from a bad wife; he had no children to console him; and he only enjoyed at rare intervals the blessing of good health. Having myself nothing to live on but the interest of my mother's little fortune, I had to make my own way in the world. Poor younger sons, not possessed of the commanding ability which achieves distinction, find the roads that lead to prosperity closed to them, with one exception. They can always apply themselves to the social arts which make a man agreeable in society. I had naturally a good voice, and I cultivated it. I was ready to sing, without being subject to the wretched vanity which makes objections and excuses—I pleased the ladies—the ladies spoke favourably of me to their husbands—and some of their husbands were persons of rank and influence. After no very long lapse of time, the result of this combination of circumstances declared itself. Monsieur Bonnefoy's lessons became the indirect means of starting me on a diplomatic career—and the diplomatic career made poor Ernest Medhurst, to his own unutterable astonishment, the hero of a love story!

The story being true, I must beg to be excused, if I abstain from mentioning names, places, and dates, when I enter on German ground. Let it be enough to say that I am writing of a bygone year in the present century, when no such thing as a German Empire existed, and when the revolutionary spirit of France was still an object of well-founded suspicion to rulers by right divine on the continent of Europe.

II.

On joining the legation, I was not particularly attracted by my chief, the Minister. His manners were oppressively polite; and his sense of his own importance was not sufficiently influenced by diplomatic reserve. I venture to describe him (mentally speaking) as an empty man, carefully trained to look full on public occasions.

My colleague, the first secretary, was a far more interesting

person. Bright, unaffected, and agreeable, he at once interested me when we were introduced to each other. I pay myself a compliment, as I consider, when I add that he became my firm and true friend.

We took a walk together in the palace gardens on the evening of my arrival. Reaching a remote part of the grounds, we were passed by a lean sallow sour-looking old man, drawn by a servant in a chair on wheels. My companion stopped, whispered to me, 'Here is the Prince,' and bowed bareheaded. I followed his example as a matter of course. The Prince feebly returned our salutation. 'Is he ill?' I asked, when we had put our hats on again.

'Shakespeare,' the secretary replied, 'tells us that "one man in his time plays many parts." Under what various aspects the Prince's character may have presented itself, in his younger days, I am not able to tell you. Since I have been here, he has played the part of a martyr to illness, misunderstood by his doctors.'

'And his daughter, the Princess—what do you say of her?'

'Ah, she is not so easily described! I can only appeal to your memory of other women like her, whom you must often have seen—women who are tall and fair, and fragile and elegant; who have delicate aquiline noses and melting blue eyes—women who have often charmed you by their tender smiles and their supple graces of movement. As for the character of this popular young lady, I must not influence you either way; study it for yourself.'

'Without a hint to guide me?'

'With a suggestion,' he replied, 'which may be worth considering. If you wish to please the Princess, begin by endeavouring to win the good graces of the Baroness.'

'Who is the Baroness?'

'One of the ladies in waiting—bosom friend of her Highness, and chosen repository of all her secrets. Personally, not likely to attract you; short and fat, and ill-tempered and ugly. Just at this time, I happen myself to get on with her better than usual. We have discovered that we possess one sympathy in common—we are the only people at Court who don't believe in the Prince's new doctor.'

'Is the new doctor a quack?'

The secretary looked round, before he answered, to see that nobody was near us.

‘It strikes me,’ he said, ‘that the Doctor is a spy. Mind! I have no right to speak of him in that way; it is only my impression—and I ought to add that appearances are all in his favour. He is in the service of our nearest royal neighbour, the Grand Duke; and he has been sent here expressly to relieve the sufferings of the Duke’s good friend and brother, our invalid Prince. This is an honourable mission no doubt. And the man himself is handsome, well-bred, and (I don’t quite know whether this is an additional recommendation) a countryman of ours. Nevertheless I doubt him, and the Baroness doubts him. You are an independent witness; I shall be anxious to hear if your opinion agrees with ours.’

I was presented at Court, towards the end of the week; and, in the course of the next two or three days, I more than once saw the Doctor again. The impression that he produced on me surprised my colleague. It was my opinion that he and the Baroness had mistaken the character of a worthy and capable man.

The secretary obstinately adhered to his own view. ‘Wait a little,’ he answered, ‘and we shall see.’

He was quite right. We did see.

III.

But the Princess—the gentle, gracious, beautiful Princess—what can I say of her Highness? I can only say that she enchanted me.

I had been a little discouraged by the reception that I met with from her father. Strictly confining himself within the limits of politeness, he bade me welcome to his Court in the fewest possible words, and then passed me by without further notice. He afterwards informed the English Minister that I had been so unfortunate as to try his temper: ‘Your new secretary irritates me, sir—he is a person in an offensively perfect state of health.’ The Prince’s charming daughter was not of her father’s way of thinking; it is impossible to say how graciously, how sweetly I was received. She honoured me by speaking to me in my own language, of which she showed herself to be a perfect mistress. I was not only permitted, but encouraged, to talk of my family, and to dwell on my own tastes, amusements, and pursuits. Even when her Highness’s attention was claimed by other persons

waiting to be presented, I was not forgotten. The Baroness was instructed to invite me for the next evening to the Princess's tea-table ; and it was hinted that I should be especially welcome if I brought my music with me, and sang.

My friend the secretary, standing near us at the time, looked at me with a mysterious smile. He had suggested that I should make advances to the Baroness—and here was the Baroness (under royal instructions) making advances to Me !

‘ We know what *that* means,’ he whispered.

In justice to myself, I must declare that I failed to understand him.

On the occasion of my second reception by the Princess, at her little evening party, I detected the Baroness, more than once, in the act of watching her Highness and myself, with an appearance of disapproval in her manner which puzzled me. When I had taken my leave, she followed me out of the room.

‘ I have a word of advice to give you,’ she said. ‘ The best thing you can do, sir, is to make an excuse to your Minister, and go back to England.’

I declare again, that I failed to understand the Baroness.

IV.

Before the season came to an end, the Court removed to the Prince's country-seat, in the interests of his Highness's health. Entertainments were given (at the Doctor's suggestion), with a view of raising the Prince's depressed spirits. The members of the English legation were among the guests invited. To me it was a delightful visit. I had again every reason to feel gratefully sensible of the Princess's condescending kindness. Meeting the secretary one day in the library, I said that I thought her a perfect creature. Was this an absurd remark to make ? I could see nothing absurd in it—and yet my friend burst out laughing.

‘ My good fellow, nobody is a perfect creature,’ he said. ‘ The Princess has her faults and failings, like the rest of us.’

I denied it positively.

‘ Use your eyes,’ he went on ; ‘ and you will see, for example, that she is shallow and frivolous. Yesterday was a day of rain. We were all obliged to employ ourselves somehow, indoors. Didn't you notice that she had no resources in herself ? She can't even read.’

'There you are wrong at any rate,' I declared. 'I saw her reading the newspaper.'

'You saw her with the newspaper in her hand. If you had not been deaf and blind to her defects, you would have noticed that she couldn't fix her attention on it. She was always ready to join in the chatter of the ladies about her. When even their stores of gossip were exhausted, she let the newspaper drop on her lap, and sat in vacant idleness smiling at nothing.'

I reminded him that she might have met with a dull number of the newspaper. He took no notice of this unanswerable reply.

'You were talking the other day of her warmth of feeling,' he proceeded. 'She has plenty of sentiment (German sentiment), I grant you, but no true feeling. What happened only this morning, when the Prince was in the breakfast-room, and when the Princess and her ladies were dressed to go out riding? Even she noticed the wretchedly depressed state of her father's spirits. A man of that hypochondriacal temperament suffers acutely, though he may only fancy himself to be ill. The Princess overflowed with sympathy, but she never proposed to stay at home, and try to cheer the old man. Her filial duty was performed to her own entire satisfaction, when she had kissed her hand to the Prince. The moment after, she was out of the room—eager to enjoy her ride. We all heard her laughing gaily among the ladies in the hall.'

I could have answered this also, if our discussion had not been interrupted at the moment. The Doctor came into the library in search of a book. When he had left us, my colleague's strong prejudice against him instantly declared itself.

'Be on your guard with that man,' he said.

'Why?' I asked.

'Haven't you noticed,' he replied, 'that when the Princess is talking to you, the Doctor always happens to be in that part of the room?'

'What does it matter where the Doctor is?'

My friend looked at me with an oddly mingled expression of doubt and surprise. 'Do you really not understand me?' he said.

'I don't indeed.'

'My dear Ernest, you are a rare and admirable example to the rest of us—you are a truly modest man.'

What did he mean?

V.

Events followed, on the next day, which (as will presently be seen) I have a personal interest in relating.

The Baroness left us suddenly, on leave of absence. The Prince wearied of his residence in the country; and the Court returned to the capital. The charming Princess was reported to be 'indisposed,' and retired to the seclusion of her own apartments.

A week later, I received a note from the Baroness, marked 'private and confidential.' It informed me that she had resumed her duties as lady in waiting, and that she wished to see me at my earliest convenience. I obeyed at once; and naturally asked if there were better accounts of her Highness's health.

The Baroness's reply a little surprised me. She said, 'The Princess is perfectly well.'

'Recovered already!' I exclaimed.

'She has never been ill,' the Baroness answered. 'Her indisposition was a sham; forced on her by me, in her own interests. Her reputation is in peril; and you—you hateful Englishman—are the cause of it.'

Not feeling disposed to put up with such language as this, even when it was used by a lady, I requested that she would explain herself. She complied without hesitation. In another minute my eyes were opened to the truth. I knew—no; that is too positive—let me say I had reason to believe the Princess loved me!

I find it simply impossible to convey to the minds of others any idea of the emotions that overwhelmed me at that critical moment of my life. It was all confusion at the time; and, when my memory tries to realise it, it is all confusion now. The one thing I can do is to repeat what the Baroness said to me when I had in some degree recovered my composure.

'I suppose you are aware,' she began, 'of the disgrace to which the Princess's infatuation exposes her, if it is discovered? On my own responsibility I repeat what I said to you a short time since. Do you refuse to leave this place immediately?'

Does the man live, honoured as I was, who would have hesitated to refuse? Find him if you can!

'Very well,' she resumed. 'As the friend of the Princess, I

have no choice now but to take things as they are, and to make the best of them. Let us realise your position to begin with. If you were (like your elder brother) a nobleman possessed of vast estates, my royal mistress might be excused. As it is, whatever you may be in the future, you are nothing now but an obscure young man, without fortune or title. Do you see your duty to the Princess? or must I explain it to you?"

I saw my duty as plainly as she did. 'Her Highness's secret is a sacred secret,' I said. 'I am bound to shrink from no sacrifice which may preserve it.'

The Baroness smiled maliciously. 'I may have occasion,' she answered, 'to remind you of what you have just said. In the meanwhile, the Princess's secret is in danger of discovery.'

'By her father?'

'No. By the Doctor.'

At first, I doubted whether she was in jest or in earnest. The next instant, I remembered that the secretary had expressly cautioned me against that man.

'It is evidently one of your virtues,' the Baroness proceeded, 'to be slow to suspect. Prepare yourself for a disagreeable surprise. The Doctor has been watching the Princess, on every occasion when she speaks to you, with some object of his own in view. During my absence, young sir, I have been engaged in discovering what that object is. My excellent mother lives at the Court of the Grand Duke, and enjoys the confidence of his Ministers. He is still a bachelor; and, in the interests of the succession to the throne, the time has arrived when he must marry. With my mother's assistance, I have found out that the Doctor's medical errand here is a pretence. Influenced by the Princess's beauty, the Grand Duke has thought of her first as his future Duchess. Whether he has heard slanderous stories, or whether he is only a cautious man, I can't tell you. But this I know: he has instructed his physician—if he had employed a professed diplomatist, his motive might have been suspected—to observe her Highness privately, and to communicate the result. The object of the report is to satisfy the Duke that the Princess's reputation is above the reach of scandal; that she is free from entanglements of a certain kind; and that she is in every respect a person to whom he can with propriety offer his hand in marriage. The Doctor, Mr. Ernest, is not disposed to allow you to prevent him from sending in a favourable report. He has drawn his con-

elusions from the Princess's extraordinary kindness to the second secretary of the English legation ; and he is only waiting for a little plainer evidence to communicate his suspicions to the Prince. It rests with you to save the Princess.'

'Only tell me how I am to do it !' I said.

'There is but one way of doing it,' she answered ; 'and that way has (comically enough) been suggested to me by the Doctor himself.'

Her tone and manner tried my patience. 'Come to the point !' I said.

She seemed to enjoy provoking me.

'No hurry, Mr. Ernest—no hurry ! You shall be fully enlightened if you will only wait a little. The Prince, I must tell you, believes in his daughter's indisposition. When he visited her this morning, he was attended by his medical adviser. I was present at the interview. To do him justice, the Doctor is worthy of the trust reposed in him—he boldly attempted to verify his suspicions of the daughter, in the father's presence.'

'How ?'

'Oh, in the well-known way that has been tried over and over again, under similar circumstances ! He merely invented a report that you were engaged in a love-affair with some charming person in the town. Don't be angry ; there's no harm done.'

'But there *is* harm done,' I insisted. 'What must the Princess think of me ?'

'Do you suppose she is weak enough to believe the Doctor ? Her Highness beat him at his own weapons ; not the slightest sign of agitation on her part rewarded his ingenuity. All that you have to do is to help her to mislead this medical spy. It's as easy as lying, and easier. The Doctor's slander declares that you have a love-affair in the town. Take the hint—and astonish the Doctor by proving that he has hit on the truth.'

It was a hot day ; the Baroness was beginning to get excited. She paused, and fanned herself. 'Do I startle you ?' she asked.

'You disgust me.'

She laughed.

'What a thick-headed man this is !' she said pleasantly. 'Must I put it more plainly still ? Engage in what your English prudery calls a "flirtation," with some woman here—the lower in degree the better, or the Princess might be jealous—and let the

affair be seen and known by everybody about the Court. Sly as he is, the Doctor is not prepared for that! At your age, and with your personal advantages, he will take appearances for granted; he will conclude that he has wronged you, and misinterpreted the motives of the Princess; and the secret of her Highness's weakness will be preserved—thanks to that sacrifice, Mr. Ernest, which you are so willing and so eager to make.'

It was useless to remonstrate with such a woman as this. I simply stated my own objection to her artfully devised scheme.

'I don't wish to appear vain,' I said; 'but the woman to whom I am to pay these attentions may believe that I really admire her—and it is just possible that she may honestly return the feeling which I am only assuming.'

'Well—and what then?'

'It's hard on the woman, surely?'

The Baroness was shocked, unaffectedly shocked.

'Good heavens!' she exclaimed, 'how can anything that you do for the Princess be hard on a woman of the lower orders? There must be an end of this nonsense, sir! You have heard what I propose; and you know what the circumstances are. My mistress is waiting for your answer. What am I to say?'

'Let me see her Highness, and speak for myself,' I said.

'Quite impossible to-day, without running too great a risk. Your reply must be made through me.'

There was to be a Court concert at the end of the week. On that occasion I should be able to make my own reply. In the meanwhile I only told the Baroness I wanted time to consider.'

'What time?' she asked.

'Until to-morrow. Do you object?'

'On the contrary, I cordially agree. Your base hesitation may lead to results which I have not hitherto dared to anticipate.'

'What do you mean?'

'Between this and to-morrow,' the horrid woman replied, 'the Princess may end in seeing you with my eyes. In that hope I wish you good morning.'

VI.

My enemies say that I am a weak man, unduly influenced by persons of rank—because of their rank. If this were true, I should have found little difficulty in consenting to adopt the Baroness's suggestion. As it was, the longer I reflected on the

scheme the less I liked it. I tried to think of some alternative that might be acceptably proposed. The time passed, and nothing occurred to me. In this embarrassing position my mind became seriously disturbed ; I felt the necessity of obtaining some relief, which might turn my thoughts for a while into a new channel. The secretary called on me, while I was still in doubt what to do. He reminded me that a new prima-donna was advertised to appear on that night ; and he suggested that we should go to the opera. Feeling as I did at the time, I readily agreed.

We found the theatre already filled, before the performance began. Two French gentlemen were seated in the row of stalls behind us. They were talking of the new singer.

‘She is advertised as “*Mademoiselle Coraly*,”’ one of them said. ‘That sounds like an assumed name.’

‘It *is* an assumed name,’ the other replied. ‘She is the daughter of a French singing-master, named Bonnefoy.’

To my friend’s astonishment I started to my feet, and left him without a word of apology. In another minute I was at the stage-door, and had sent in my card to ‘*Mademoiselle Coraly*.’ While I was waiting, I had time to think. Was it possible that Jeanne had gone on the stage ? Or were there two singing-masters in existence named Bonnefoy ? My doubts were soon decided. The French woman-servant whom I remembered when I was Monsieur Bonnefoy’s pupil, made her appearance, and conducted me to her young mistress’s dressing-room. Dear good Jeanne, how glad she was to see me !

I found her standing before the glass, having just completed her preparations for appearing on the stage. Dressed in her picturesquè costume, she was so charming that I expressed my admiration heartily as became her old friend. ‘Do you really like me ?’ she said, with the innocent familiarity which I recollect so well. ‘See how I look in the glass—that is the great test.’ It was not easy to apply the test. Instead of looking at her image in the glass, it was far more agreeable to look at herself. We were interrupted—too soon interrupted—by the call-boy. He knocked at the door, and announced that the overture had begun.

‘I have a thousand things to ask you,’ I told her. ‘What has made this wonderful change in your life ? How is it that I don’t see your father——’

Her face instantly saddened ; her hand trembled as she laid it on my arm to silence me.

‘Don’t speak of him now,’ she said, ‘or you will unnerve me! Come to me to-morrow when the stage will not be waiting; Annette will give you my address.’ She opened the door to go out, and returned. ‘Will you think me very unreasonable if I ask you not to make one of my audience to-night? You have reminded me of the dear old days that can never come again. If I feel that I am singing to *you*—’ She left me to understand the rest, and turned away again to the door. As I followed her out, to say good-bye, she drew from her bosom the little brooch which had been my parting gift, and held it out to me. ‘On the stage, or off,’ she said, ‘I always wear it. Good-night, Ernest.’

I was prepared to hear sad news, when we met the next morning.

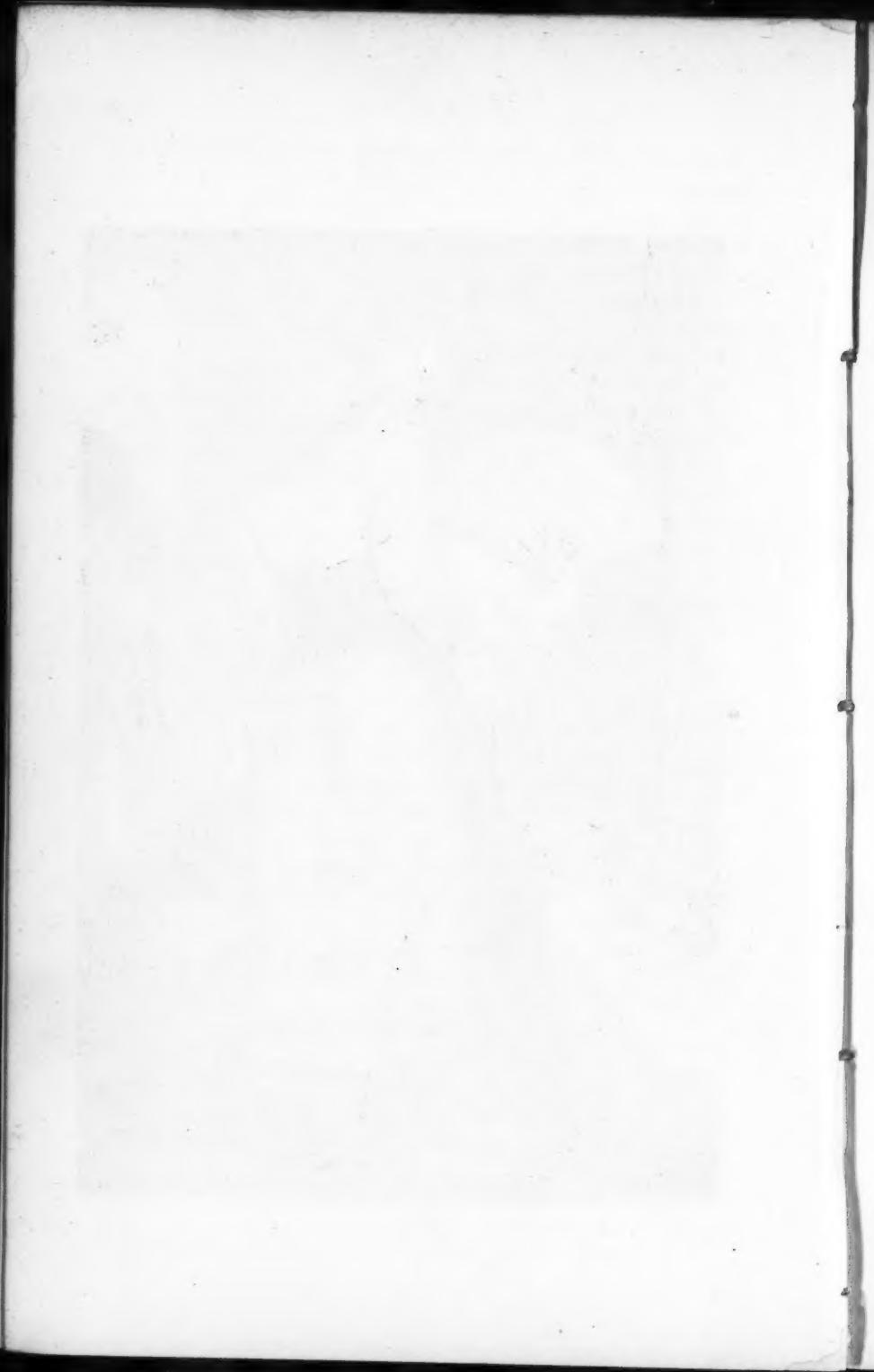
My good old friend and master had died suddenly. To add to the bitterness of that affliction, he had died in debt to a dear and intimate friend. For his daughter’s sake he had endeavoured to add to his little savings by speculating with borrowed money on the Stock Exchange. He had failed, and the loan advanced had not been repaid, when a fit of apoplexy struck him down. Offered the opportunity of trying her fortune on the operatic stage, Jeanne made the attempt, and was now nobly employed in earning the money to pay her father’s debt.

‘It was the only way in which I could do justice to his memory,’ she said simply. ‘I hope you don’t object to my going on the stage?’

I took her hand, poor child—and let that simple action answer for me. I was too deeply affected to be able to speak.

‘It is not in me to be a great actress,’ she resumed; ‘but you know what an admirable musician my father was. He has taught me to sing, so that I can satisfy the critics, as well as please the public. There was what they call a great success last night. It has earned me an engagement for another year to come, and an increase of salary. I have already sent some money to our good old friend at home, and I shall soon send more. It is my one consolation—I feel almost happy again when I am paying my poor father’s debt. No more now of my sad story! I want to hear all that you can tell me of yourself.’ She moved to the window, and looked out. ‘Oh, the beautiful blue sky! We used sometimes to take a walk, when we were in London, on fine days like this. Is there a park here?’





I took her to the palace gardens, famous for their beauty in that part of Germany.

Arm in arm we loitered along the pleasant walks. The lovely flowers, the bright sun, the fresh fragrant breeze, all helped her to recover her spirits. She began to be like the happy Jeanne of my past experience, as easily pleased as a child. When we sat down to rest, the lap of her dress was full of daisies. 'Do you remember,' she said, 'when you first taught me to make a daisy chain? Are you too great a man to help me again, now?'

We were still engaged with our chain, seated close together, when the smell of tobacco smoke was wafted to us on the air.

I looked up and saw the Doctor passing us, enjoying his cigar. He bowed; eyed my pretty companion with a malicious smile; and passed on. 'Who is that man?' she asked. 'The Prince's physician,' I replied. 'I don't like him,' she said; 'why did he smile when he looked at me?' 'Perhaps,' I suggested, 'he thought we were lovers.' She blushed. 'Don't let him think that! tell him we are only old friends.'

We were not destined to finish our flower chain on that day.

Another person interrupted us, whom I recognised as the elder brother of Monsieur Bonnefoy—already mentioned in these pages, under the name of Uncle David. Having left France for political reasons, the old republican had taken care of his niece after her father's death, and had accepted the position of Jeanne's business manager in her relations with the stage. Uncle David's object, when he joined us in the garden, was to remind her that she was wanted at rehearsal, and must at once return with him to the theatre. We parted, having arranged that I was to see the performance on that night.

Later in the day, the Baroness sent for me again.

'Let me apologise for having misunderstood you yesterday,' she said; 'and let me offer you my best congratulations. You have done wonders already in the way of misleading the Doctor. There is only one objection to that girl at the theatre—I hear she is so pretty that she may possibly displease the Princess. In other respects, she is just in the public position which will make your attentions to her look like the beginning of a serious intrigue. Bravo, Mr. Ernest—bravo!'

I was too indignant to place any restraint on the language in which I answered her.

'Understand, if you please,' I said, 'that I am renewing an

old friendship with Mademoiselle Jeanne—begun under the sanction of her father. Respect that young lady, madam, as I respect her.'

The detestable Baroness clapped her hands, as if she had been at the theatre.

'If you only say that to the Princess,' she remarked, 'as well as you have said it to me, there will be no danger of arousing her Highness's jealousy. I have a message for you. At the concert, on Saturday, you are to retire to the conservatory, and you may hope for an interview when the singers begin the second part of the programme. Don't let me detain you any longer. Go back to your young lady, Mr. Ernest—pray go back!'

VII.

On the second night of the opera the applications for places were too numerous to be received. Among the crowded audience, I recognised many of my friends. They persisted in believing an absurd report (first circulated, as I imagine, by the Doctor), which asserted that my interest in the new singer was something more than the interest of an old friend. When I went behind the scenes to congratulate Jeanne on her success, I was annoyed in another way—and by the Doctor again. He followed me to Jeanne's room, to offer *his* congratulations; and he begged that I would introduce him to the charming prima-donna. Having expressed his admiration, he looked at me with his insolently suggestive smile, and said he could not think of prolonging his intrusion. On leaving the room, he noticed Uncle David, waiting as usual to take care of Jeanne on her return from the theatre—looked at him attentively—bowed, and went out.

The next morning, I received a note from the Baroness, expressed in these terms:—

'More news! My rooms look out on the wing of the palace in which the Doctor is lodged. Half an hour since, I discovered him at his window, giving a letter to a person who is a stranger to me. The man left the palace immediately afterwards. My maid followed him, by my directions. Instead of putting the letter in the post, he took a ticket at the railway station—for what place the servant was unable to discover. Here, you will observe, is a letter important enough to be despatched by special messenger, and written at a time when we have succeeded in freeing ourselves

from the Doctor's suspicions. It is at least possible that he has decided on sending a favourable report of the Princess to the Grand Duke. If this is the case, please consider whether you will not act wisely (in her Highness's interests) by keeping away from the concert.'

Viewing this suggestion as another act of impertinence on the part of the Baroness, I persisted in my intention of going to the concert. It was for the Princess to decide what course of conduct I was bound to follow. What did I care for the Doctor's report to the Duke! Shall I own my folly? I do really believe I was jealous of the Duke.

VIII.

Entering the Concert Room, I found the Princess alone on the dais, receiving the company. 'Nervous prostration' had made it impossible for the Prince to be present. He was confined to his bed-chamber; and the Doctor was in attendance on him.

I bowed to the Baroness, but she was too seriously offended with me for declining to take her advice to notice my salutation. Passing into the conservatory, it occurred to me that I might be seen, and possibly suspected, in the interval between the first and second parts of the programme, when the music no longer absorbed the attention of the audience. I went on, and waited outside on the steps that led to the garden; keeping the glass door open, so as to hear when the music of the second part of the concert began.

After an interval which seemed to be endless, I saw the Princess approaching me.

She had made the heat in the Concert Room an excuse for retiring for a while; and she had the Baroness in attendance on her to save appearances. Instead of leaving us to ourselves, the malicious creature persisted in paying the most respectful attentions to her mistress. It was impossible to make her understand that she was not wanted any longer until the Princess said sharply, 'Go back to the music!' Even then, the detestable woman made a low curtsey, and answered, 'I will return, Madam, in five minutes.'

I ventured to present myself in the conservatory.

The Princess was dressed with exquisite simplicity, entirely in white. Her only ornaments were white roses in her hair and in her bosom. To say that she looked lovely is to say

nothing. She seemed to be the ethereal creature of some higher sphere ; too exquisitely delicate and pure to be approached by a mere mortal man like myself. I was awed ; I was silent. Her Highness's sweet smile encouraged me to venture a little nearer. She pointed to a footstool which the Baroness had placed for her. 'Are you afraid of me, Ernest ?' she asked softly.

Her divinely beautiful eyes rested on me with a look of encouragement. I dropped on my knees at her feet. She had asked if I was afraid of her. This, if I may use such an expression, roused my manhood. My own boldness astonished me. I answered, 'Madam, I adore you.'

She laid her fair hand on my head, and looked at me thoughtfully. 'Forget my rank,' she whispered—'have I not set you the example ? Suppose that I am nothing but an English Miss. What would you say to Miss ?'

'I should say, I love you.'

'Say it to Me.'

My lips said it on her hand. She bent forward. My heart beats fast at the bare remembrance of it. Oh, Heavens, Her Highness kissed me !

'There is your reward,' she murmured, 'for all that you have sacrificed for my sake. What an effort it must have been to offer the pretence of love to an obscure stranger ! The Baroness tells me this actress—this singer—what is she ?—is pretty. Is it true ?'

The Baroness was quite mischievous enough to have also mentioned the false impression, prevalent about the Court, that I was in love with Jeanne. I attempted to explain. The gracious Princess refused to hear me.

'Do you think I doubt you ?' she said. 'Distinguished by me, could you waste a look on a person in *that* rank of life ?' She laughed softly, as if the mere idea of such a thing amused her. It was only for a moment : her thoughts took a new direction—they contemplated the uncertain future. 'How is this to end ?' she asked. 'Dear Ernest, we are not in Paradise ; we are in a hard cruel world which insists on distinctions in rank. To what unhappy destiny does the fascination which you exercise over me condemn us both ?'

She paused—took one of the white roses out of her bosom—touched it with her lips—and gave it to me.

'I wonder whether you feel the burden of life as I feel it ?'

she resumed. ‘It is immaterial to me, whether we are united in this world or in the next. Accept my rose, Ernest, as an assurance that I speak with perfect sincerity. I see but two alternatives before us. One of them (beset with dangers) is elopement. And the other,’ she added, with truly majestic composure ‘is suicide.’

Would Englishmen in general have rightly understood such fearless confidence in them as this language implied? I am afraid they might have attributed it to, what my friend the secretary called, ‘German sentiment.’ Perhaps they might even have suspected the Princess of quoting from some old-fashioned German play. Under the irresistible influence of that glorious creature, I contemplated with such equal serenity the perils of elopement and the martyrdom of love, that I was for the moment at a loss how to reply. In that moment, the evil genius of my life appeared in the conservatory. With haste in her steps, with alarm in her face, the Baroness rushed up to her royal mistress, and said, ‘For God’s sake, Madam, come away! The Prince desires to speak with you instantly.’

Her Highness rose, calmly superior to the vulgar excitement of her lady in waiting. ‘Think of it to-night,’ she said to me, ‘and let me hear from you to-morrow.’

She pressed my hand; she gave me a farewell look. I sank into the chair that she had just left. Did I think of elopement? Did I think of suicide? The elevating influence of the Princess no longer sustained me; my nature became degraded. Horrid doubts rose in my mind. Did her father suspect us?

IX.

Need I say that I passed a sleepless night?

The morning found me with my pen in my hand, confronting the serious responsibility of writing to the Princess, and not knowing what to say. I had already torn up two letters, when Uncle David presented himself with a message from his niece. Jeanne was in trouble, and wanted to ask my advice.

My state of mind, on hearing this, became simply inexplicable. Here was an interruption which ought to have annoyed me. It did nothing of the kind—it inspired me with a feeling of relief!

I naturally expected that the old Frenchman would return with me to his niece, and tell me what had happened. To my surprise, he begged that I would excuse him, and left me without

a word of explanation. I found Jeanne walking up and down her little sitting-room, flushed and angry. Fragments of torn paper and heaps of flowers littered the floor ; and three unopened jewel-cases appeared to have been thrown into the empty fireplace. She caught me excitedly by the hand the moment I entered the room.

‘ You are my true friend,’ she said ; ‘ you were present the other night when I sang. Was there anything in my behaviour on the stage, which could justify men who call themselves gentlemen in insulting me ? ’

‘ My dear, how can you ask the question ? ’

‘ I must ask it. Some of them send flowers, and some of them send jewels ; and every one of them writes letters—infamous abominable letters—saying they are in love with me, and asking for appointments as if I was—— ! ’

She could say no more. Poor dear Jeanne—her head dropped on my shoulder ; she burst out crying. Who could see her so cruelly humiliated—the faithful loving daughter, whose one motive for appearing on the stage had been to preserve her father’s good name—and not feel for her as I did ? I forgot all considerations of prudence ; I thought of nothing but consoling her ; I took her in my arms ; I dried her tears ; I kissed her ; I said, ‘ Tell me the name of any one of the wretches who has written to you, and I will make him an example to the rest ! ’ She shook her head, and pointed to the morsels of paper on the floor. ‘ Oh, Ernest, do you think I asked you to come here for any such purpose as that ? Those jewels, those hateful jewels, tell me how I can send them back ! spare me the sight of them ! ’

So far, it was easy to console her. I sent the jewels at once to the manager of the theatre—with a written notice to be posted at the stage door, stating that they were waiting to be returned to the persons who could describe them.

‘ Try, my dear, to forget what has happened,’ I said. ‘ Try to find consolation and encouragement in your art.’

‘ I have lost all interest in my success on the stage,’ she answered, ‘ now I know the penalty I must pay for it. When my father’s memory is clear of reproach, I shall leave the theatre never to return to it again.’

‘ Take time to consider, Jeanne.’

‘ I will do anything you ask of me.’

For a while we were silent. Without any influence to lead to

it that I could trace, I found myself recalling the language that the Princess had used in alluding to Jeanne. When I thought of them now, the words and the tone in which they had been spoken jarred on me. There is surely something mean in an assertion of superiority which depends on nothing better than the accident of birth. I don't know why I took Jeanne's hand ; I don't know why I said, ' What a good girl you are ! how glad I am to have been of some little use to you ! ' Is my friend the secretary right, when he reproaches me with acting on impulse like a woman ? I don't like to think so ; and yet, this I must own—it was well for me that I was obliged to leave her, before I had perhaps said other words which might have been alike unworthy of Jeanne, of the Princess, and of myself. I was called away to speak to my servant. He brought with him the secretary's card, having a line written on it : ' I am waiting at your rooms, on business which permits of no delay.'

As we shook hands, Jeanne asked me if I knew where her uncle was. I could only tell her that he had left me at my own door. She made no remark ; but she seemed to be uneasy on receiving that reply.

X.

When I arrived at my rooms, my colleague hurried to meet me the moment I opened the door.

' I am going to surprise you,' he said ; ' and there is no time to prepare you for it. Our chief, the Minister, has seen the Prince this morning, and has been officially informed of an event of importance in the life of the Princess. She is engaged to be married to the Grand Duke.'

Engaged to the Duke—and not a word from her to warn me of it ! Engaged—after what she had said to me no longer ago than the past night ! Had I been made a plaything to amuse a great lady ? Oh, what degradation ! I was furious ; I snatched up my hat to go to the palace—to force my way to her—to overwhelm her with reproaches. My friend stopped me. He put an official document into my hand.

' There is your leave of absence from the legation,' he said ; ' beginning from to-day. I have informed the Minister, in strict confidence, of the critical position in which you are placed. He agrees with me that the Princess's inexcusable folly is alone to blame. Leave us, Ernest, by the next train. There is some

intrigue going on, and I fear you may be involved in it. You know that the rulers of these little German States can exercise despotic authority, when they choose ?'

'Yes! yes!'

'Whether the Prince has acted of his own free will—or whether he has been influenced by some person about him—I am not able to tell you. He has issued an order to arrest an old Frenchman, known to be a republican, and suspected of associating with one of the secret societies in this part of Germany. The conspirator has taken to flight; having friends, as we suppose, who warned him in time. But this, Ernest, is not the worst of it. That charming singer, that modest pretty girl—'

'You don't mean Jeanne?'

'I am sorry to say I do. Advantage has been taken of her relationship to the old man, to include that innocent creature in political suspicions which it is simply absurd to suppose that she has deserved. She is ordered to leave the Prince's dominions immediately.—Are you going to her?'

'Instantly!' I replied.

Could I feel a moment's hesitation, after the infamous manner in which the Princess had sacrificed me to the Grand Duke? Could I think of the poor girl, friendless, helpless—with nobody near her but a stupid woman-servant, unable to speak the language of the country—and fail to devote myself to the protection of Jeanne? Thank God, I reached her lodgings in time to tell her what had happened, and to take it on myself to receive the police.

XI.

In three days more, Jeanne was safe in London; having travelled under my escort. I was fortunate enough to find a home for her, in the house of a lady who had been my mother's oldest and dearest friend.

We were separated, a few days afterwards, by the distressing news which reached me of the state of my brother's health. I went at once to his house in the country. His medical attendants had lost all hope of saving him: they told me plainly that his release from a life of suffering was near at hand.

While I was still in attendance at his bedside, I heard from the secretary. He enclosed a letter, directed to me in a strange

handwriting. I opened the envelope, and looked for the signature. My friend had been entrapped into sending me an anonymous letter.

Besides addressing me in French (a language never used in my experience at the legation), the writer disguised the identity of the persons mentioned by the use of classical names. In spite of these precautions, I felt no difficulty in arriving at a conclusion. My correspondent's special knowledge of Court secrets, and her malicious way of communicating them, betrayed the Baroness.

I translate the letter; restoring to the persons who figure in it the names under which they are already known. The writer began in these satirically familiar terms :

‘When you left the Prince’s dominions, my dear sir, you no doubt believed yourself to be a free agent. Quite a mistake! You were a mere puppet; and the strings that moved you were pulled by the Doctor.

‘Let me tell you how.

‘On a certain night, which you well remember, the Princess was unexpectedly summoned to the presence of her father. His physician’s skill had succeeded in relieving the illustrious Prince, prostrate under nervous miseries. He was able to attend to a state affair of importance, revealed to him by the Doctor—who then for the first time acknowledged that he had presented himself at Court in a diplomatic, as well as in a medical capacity.

‘This state affair related to a proposal for the hand of the Princess, received from the Grand Duke through the authorised medium of the Doctor. Her Highness, being consulted, refused to consider the proposal. The Prince asked for her reason. She answered, “I have no wish to be married.” Naturally irritated by such a ridiculous excuse, her father declared positively that the marriage should take place.

‘The impression produced on the Grand Duke’s favourite and emissary was of a different kind.

‘Certain suspicions of the Princess and yourself, which you had successfully contrived to dissipate, revived in the Doctor’s mind when he heard the lady’s reason for refusing to marry his royal master. It was now too late to regret that he had suffered himself to be misled by cleverly managed appearances. He could not recall the favourable report which he had addressed to the Duke—or withdraw the proposal of marriage which he had been commanded to make.

‘In this emergency, the one safe course open to him was to

get rid of You—and, at the same time, so to handle circumstances as to excite against you the pride and anger of the Princess. In the pursuit of this latter object he was assisted by one of the ladies in waiting, sincerely interested in the welfare of her gracious mistress, and therefore ardently desirous of seeing her Highness married to the Duke.

‘A wretched old French conspirator was made the convenient pivot on which the intrigue turned.

‘An order for the arrest of this foreign republican having been first obtained, the Prince was prevailed on to extend his distrust of the Frenchman to the Frenchman’s niece. You know this already; but you don’t know why it was done. Having believed from the first that you were really in love with the young lady, the Doctor reckoned confidently on your devoting yourself to the protection of a friendless girl, cruelly exiled at an hour’s notice.

‘The one chance against us was that tender considerations, associated with her Highness, might induce you to hesitate. The lady in waiting easily moved this obstacle out of the way. She abstained from delivering a letter addressed to you, entrusted to her by the Princess. When the great lady asked why she had not received your reply, she was informed (quite truly) that you and the charming opera singer had taken your departure together. You may imagine what her Highness thought of you, and said of you, when I mention in conclusion that she consented, the same day, to marry the Duke.’

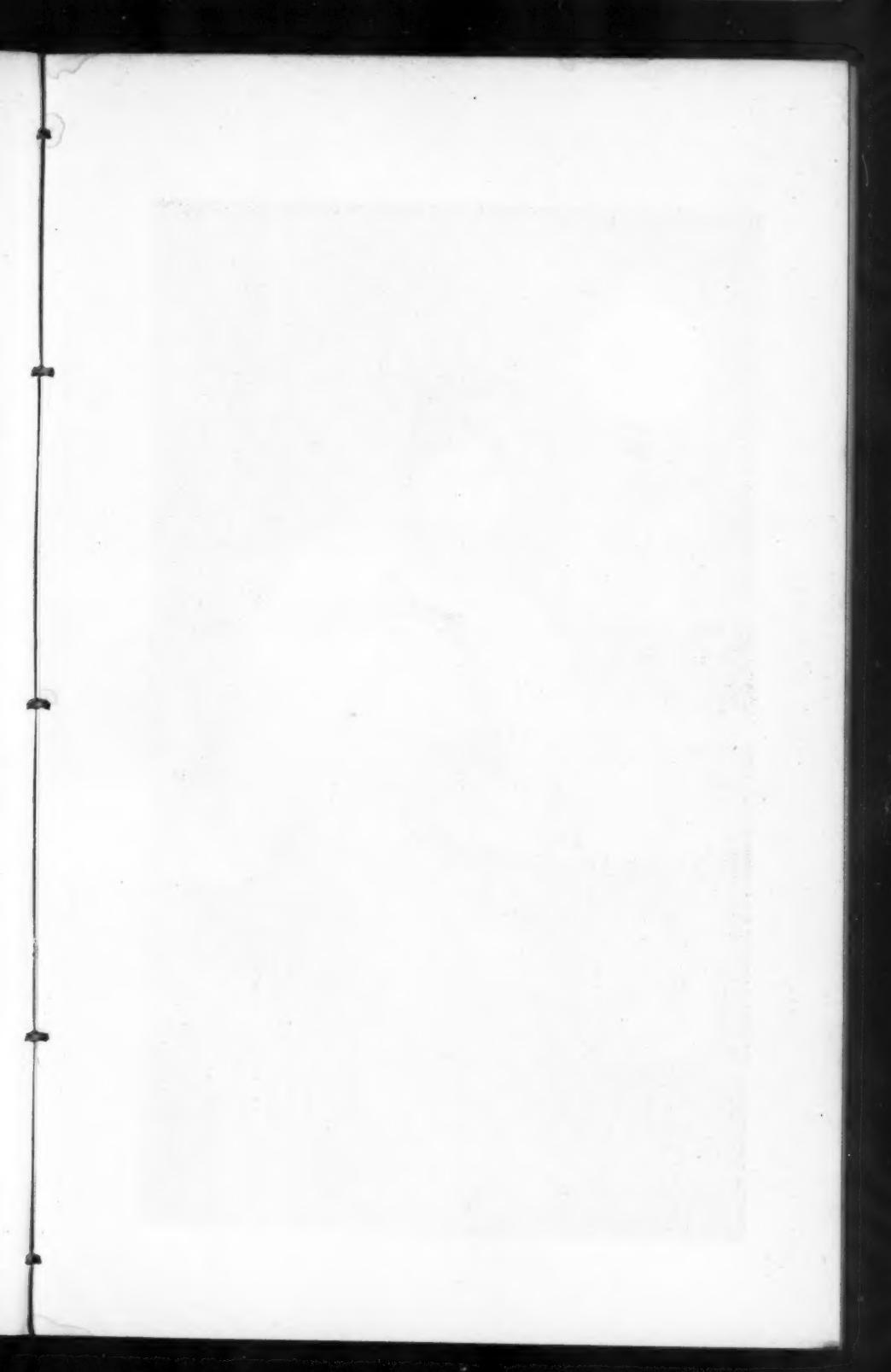
‘So, Mr. Ernest, these clever people tricked you into serving their interests, blindfold. In relating how it was done, I hope I may have assisted you in forming a correct estimate of the state of your own intelligence. You have made a serious mistake in adopting your present profession. Give up diplomacy—and get a farmer to employ you in keeping his sheep.’

XII.

Do I sometimes think regretfully of the Princess?

Permit me to mention a circumstance, and to leave my answer to be inferred. Jeanne is Lady Medhurst.

(The End.)





Esmé von Lindenheim.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'MISS MOLLY,' 'DELICIA,' &c.

CHAPTER I.

'THE WHITE SKIES THRILL WITH A MOON UNARISEN.'

'SYDNEY!' At the sound of the calling voice a girl rose from the low seat, luxuriously filled with scarlet cushions, under the tulipa-tree, in which she had been reclining, and for a moment looked round half-bewildered. Then, 'Father, dear, do you want me?' she answered, and hastened to meet an old man coming towards her over the close-cropped grass.

'It is nothing very important,' he replied, as he reached her side; 'it would have kept; only, happening to glance out of doors, I was tempted for a moment to think the library looked dull.'

'It was a good thought, father, and now that you are here, stay and have tea with me.'

'There is so much sunshine in the world,' he added, absently, looking overhead into the cloudless blue, 'and sometimes indoors one is inclined to forget it.'

They were a curious contrast outwardly, this father and daughter; he so small and fragile-looking, with his smooth white head and gentle face—a scholar's thoughtfulness in its refinement—she, so tall, and strong, and upright. But if the points of divergence were marked thus strongly, there were stronger points still that made the meeting places easy of attainment. In her grey eyes Godfrey Loraine saw those that had tenderly lightened and smiled for him, before he had known that the daughter's life must cost the mother's; and though the buried dream had sufficed him as far as this world was concerned, and 'Finis' was written across the folded page that Death had turned, yet he did not fret and mourn, or even ceaselessly regret, but passed a hard-

working scholar's life ; the only pleasure, outside his books, this girl, who, in his library, in his walks, in all his pursuits, was rarely absent from his side. Thus life rounded itself afresh, only sometimes he forgot, as he said, how much sunshine, except in books, the world contained.

And now the child was a woman. The days were over when, with her arms clasped tight about a giant sunflower, she had exclaimed, 'Next year I shall be as tall as it is !' Gone the time when she had stood, her blonde head reaching up to his grey one, and had said with triumph, 'Father, I am taller than you are. Soon I shall be grown up.'

Yes, all that was past, the time had come. The blonde head was smooth and brown, the tall slim figure had grown round and beautiful, and childhood was over.

Then for a time a new trouble had haunted him. She would marry. One day she would come and say that the dawn had melted into a golden present, that Love had touched her with its wings, that all its beautiful hopes and fears were about her, creating a new world into which she was longing to go ; and he, remembering those other grey eyes, would have to believe, and bid her 'God speed,' though any other paradise always seems cold and unbeautiful, compared with the one from which we are exiled.

So he had trembled and waited, but as yet no such day had dawned. No sad or happy love-story had come to trouble the repose of the calm grey eyes ; and now behold, she was three-and-twenty, and it was so long since he had first thought of her leaving him, that Godfrey Loraine had ceased to be afraid.

'I was nearly asleep, father,' she said, as they sauntered away together under the sheltering trees. 'It was so hot that I gave up reading and tried to think, always a dangerous experiment, but I am wide awake now. Tell me what it is.'

'It is only that young Lindenheim has been up to see me this afternoon, and when he told me he was staying at "The Falcon," I asked him to come here instead. I knew his father when we were both students, and he has sent me books and notes by this young man which will be invaluable to me.'

'That is good of him,' Sydney replied, 'and, of course, it was right to ask the son to come here, but I cannot help wishing that he had preferred "The Falcon." Men, you know, dear father, are a great deal of trouble. They are not content. They

want'—she paused a moment, looking round as if wondering what more they could want, and added after that moment—‘lawn tennis.’

‘But this one will not, I am certain,’ replied her father.

‘To be sure, he is German. No’—reflectively—‘he is far more likely to want a poetry book, and that in this house he is easily provided with. There, dear father, you see I am beforehand making the best of him. It is selfishness, of course, but one never wants outsiders in Paradise.’

‘No,’ said her father, with a little amused smile, ‘especially as outsiders sometimes take the form of the serpent.’

‘Father,’ she retorted, ‘you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I only spoke thus to give you an opportunity of defending him. I shall be obliged now to defend him myself, and he is your friend.’

‘My friend’s son—and sons and fathers, alas! are often sadly unlike. But this especial son pleased me. He reminded me very much of what his father was when we got into mischief together, in prehistoric times.’

Lamplight was scarcely needed yet, even for dinner, though a few wax candles did help out the waning daylight; but in the beautiful drawing-room, which opened at one end into a spacious well-filled library—descriptive combination which figured forth the joint lives passed in the two rooms—no artificial light was needed. It was a beautiful room on the first story, and its wide-open windows looked down into the square, sheltered garden, round three sides of which the house was built—the garden where Sydney had slept that afternoon. She and her father stood together by one of the windows, round which grew honeysuckle and yellow roses, and the silence that only calm, satisfied love can appreciate and comprehend had enfolded them for some time as they stood thus looking together across the garden on to the rose-touched, sunset sky beyond. Their hearts so near together, and yet their thoughts so far apart. His turning back to that buried past, which would rise up before him in such moments as these; hers on to the future, which every girl, consciously or unconsciously, believes some coming, unborn day holds for her.

‘Ah! here is Count von Lindenheim.’

Back to the world Godfrey Loraine came with a little sigh. Back from her dreams came also Sydney at her father’s voice saying, ‘This is my daughter,’ as if he had said ‘This is my

queen,' to find a tall, fair-haired man bowing to her, and telling her in very careful, but apparently good English, that he was very grateful to have been asked to this beautiful house, instead of being left at the inn.

'Oh! but you must not despise "The Falcon,"' Sydney replied demurely, 'because we consider it a very grand establishment in our country side.'

'Despise it!' he repeated, 'no;' then stopped as if unwilling to say what had been in his mind, and added after that pause, 'I have been content with it hitherto.'

He spoke to her father for the few moments until dinner was announced, but as he talked he looked now and then towards where the girl stood still in the shadow of the curtain watching the rosy clouds assembling for the sunset.

She was dressed entirely in white—a very long plain gown, and she wore no ornaments, no colour anywhere about her, excepting three rows of gold braid in her dark-brown hair, and a little bunch of yellow daisies in the lace at her throat. In her hand she held a large screen of peacock's feathers.

But the plainness of her dress suited her, like her repose of manner, and the rather slow, soft way she had of speaking, or rather, as this stranger observed, hearing her address her father, she had a way of beginning her sentences slowly and then hurrying a little over the last words, which pleased his ear; it sounded like a soft little caress given to the gentle old man, who seemed to live in her love. It was a tender domestic drama, and he found his thoughts wandering to it occasionally. Then dinner was announced, and he was walking downstairs with Sydney Loraine's hand on his arm.

He was a very handsome man—of that fact Miss Loraine had been aware when she first looked into his delicate, fair face; but the charm of which she was conscious lay in something more than beauty, and she was conscious all dinner-time of watching him, and striving to analyse whence it proceeded.

The courteous manner in which he listened to her old father pleased her, it was so entirely wanting in either the flippancy or roughness which jarred upon her often in the younger men she met. They wanted something distinct from the mannerisms of an older generation, which were unsuited to their youth, and which yet should not take the form of no manners at all; some subtle mingling of dignity and courtesy, which this stranger was

possessed of. Without being sad his face was grave—grave for his one-and-thirty years; but once, as he suddenly looked up and smiled at some reminiscence of his father's youth, of which Mr. Loraine was speaking, Sydney noted the light it lent to his face, changing it in a moment, adding sweetness to the lines about the mouth, and lighting as with sunshine the blue eyes. His talk was chiefly with Mr. Loraine, and with him about the papers and books on botanical subjects which he had brought from his father. He appeared to be not ignorant himself of the subject, and spoke as if it were one on which he was accustomed to express opinions. And Sydney grew quiet and listened, and then found her thoughts drifting away into speculation of what his home might be like, and what his life might be.

‘I suppose he is a soldier,’ recalling his nationality. ‘I dare say father has told me, but I quite forget.’

‘You are very quiet, Sydney.’ Her father's voice recalled her to the fact that dinner was over. ‘Are you going to show Count Lindenheim our beautiful garden?’

‘No, father, I am not.’ And then, turning in an explanatory manner to her guest, ‘Whenever father says that,’ she began, ‘it means that he hopes I am going somewhere where I shall remain ignorant of the fact that he is writing or reading by candle-light. And that is forbidden.’

‘She takes great care of me,’ remarked Mr. Loraine, ‘and, unfortunately, it is impossible to deceive her.’

‘True, father, and that kind of woman is very tiresome in every-day life.’

‘And why?’

She had spoken jestingly, but Count von Lindenheim's eyes were turned gravely upon her, as if demanding an explanation of her random words.

‘Well, why, Sydney?’ her father questioned also during the little pause.

‘I feel as if I were an oracle,’ she replied, ‘having to give two answers to the same question. To *you*, father, because, speaking from experience, men are always doing things that they do not wish to be found out.’ And then, her voice changing, and losing its light tones as she rose, and turned towards the earnest eyes still turned towards her, ‘Because men can never quite rise to the same heights they were on, *before* they were found out.’

Having spoken she walked away and left them, and she was

not quite certain, as no comment followed her words, whether the rapid English had not a little perplexed him.

But apparently it was not so, for a very short time afterwards, as she sat in the low window-seat toying with the peacock fan she again held, the door opened to admit the two men. And almost immediately the younger walked over to her side, and picking up the conversation where they had left it off: 'Then you think that no man can remain what a woman believes him to be?' he asked.

'That he must be found out? That is exactly what I told father.'

'Ah! but the oracle must not mingle its answers. Mine was different—and I disagree with it.'

'And why?' she asked, her voice growing more serious, and the fan falling unnoticed on her lap. 'Do you think that the woman is deceivable, or that the man would never do anything that he would not wish her to know? I, you know, only deplored her keen-sightedness—it is her misfortune.'

'No, it is not, there I disagree. But is it fair to put us on heights, and then blame us because you find out we are not capable of remaining there? It is blaming the idol, when you should blame the idolater.'

'Perhaps,' she said thoughtfully.

He had spoken seriously, but when he noted how grave her face was, he smiled. And then, 'No, no,' he added; 'we won't quarrel, when after all we are agreed. It is truth, truth, we are both defending; you only say you deplore its presence sometimes, because it shows us what we should not discover without its light. And I say, better discover it.'

'And I still am not sure,' she made answer more lightly, 'if it were not better to live in a fool's paradise to the last moment possible!'

'Don't answer her, Lindenheim,' Mr. Loraine said, who had drawn near. 'She would state anything to lead one into an argument, and would always say the thing most likely to cause a spirit of contradiction to rise in her hearer. I know her better than to take the adroitly disguised hook. Enough of argument. Sing, Sydney, sing.'

'It is postponed,' said Sydney, philosophically. 'I will sing. And you also, I am sure,' turning to her guest. 'Our united talents will, I am sure—father,' breaking off suddenly.

'My dear child, yes'—in rather a hurried manner—'what is it?'

'There was guilt in the tones of your voice. Where are you?'

'I am here,' rather nervously; 'I can hear you perfectly. Sing "Yesterday."

Sydney gave a little slight shrug as she sat down at the piano. 'There is no use being too strict,' she remarked, smiling. 'One must overlook shortcomings as often as it is possible.'

'Particularly when they make people happy.'

'That is a very bad reason,' she began.

'We are arguing again,' he said. 'That has also been forbidden. Let me hear the song first.'

She sang one or two simple little German songs that suited her voice, and her listener remained on by her side whilst the twilight deepened so gradually, that very soon the one bright spot in the room came from the candles on the piano. Then she paused, and asked: 'But now it is your turn, do you not sing?'

'No,' he answered, 'but I play.'

She gave up her place to him, and resumed the seat where she had been before, in the low window-seat by the open window.

The night had grown still and quiet, the rosy lights had all vanished, and thousands of stars shone overhead in the clear blue sky. The gentle stirring of the acacia trees below, the soft scents that the night air was bringing from the roses and honeysuckle, seemed to belong to some different world from the one in which she had dreamed away the afternoon hours. Perhaps it was Mendelssohn's dreamy music, interpreted by a master hand, that had somewhat to do with the change. And when at length he rose and came and stood by her side he did not at once speak, and to her no commonplace word of thanks seemed necessary.

'It is magic,' he said, as round the corner of the dark building opposite came a sudden stream of moonlight, that touched with silver the trees below.

'Yes, it is magic,' she answered. 'I thought your playing had conjured it up, and I feared to speak, lest it should all vanish away. But now that you have spoken and the charm still works, let me thank you—'

'For the music? Ah, that reminds me of home. When I am there, I always play until I am told to leave off. My father is very fond of music.'

'And what does home consist of?' she questioned. He was standing in front of her, leaning against the window-sash, and she looked up at him as she spoke. The moonlight was touching

her with its weird light, and he paused a moment before answering.

‘Home consists of a father and five sons,’ he said. ‘Somehow a home wants a woman to complete it. I always think so when I am there, which is not often. I am a soldier.’

‘Ah!’ she stirred a little, and sat more upright. And then: ‘You have not a sister?’ she added, as if that were not the first thing she had meant to say.

‘No, I have never had a sister, and my mother has been dead many years.’

‘Yes,’ she said, after a pause, ‘somehow home does seem to require a woman; yet’—thoughtfully—‘I am not sure. It sometimes seems to me that men say that when they wish to be pleasant to us and give us a share in their lives, but I am not sure that it is true. They do very well without us—it is impossible to imagine we are necessary to their happiness—though we may be to their comfort.’

He looked at her a moment in silence, in a way he had which left her in doubt as to whether he was trying to adjust her sentence to his own mind before answering, or whether it was merely her English that had perplexed him, and then said: ‘You are mistaken; a man perhaps does not wish to be alone: but he must not make a mistake. For then it is not only his own happiness that is lost, but hers.’

‘And the woman?’ she questioned quickly, sitting a little more upright. ‘Is it fair that she too should not wait? But, perhaps,’ smiling, ‘her mistake does not matter?’

‘Not so much,’ he answered, and he still spoke gravely. ‘It need not affect anyone but herself. It is only necessary that she should adjust her life to her mistake.’

She rose to her feet with so sudden a movement, that the feather fan which had lain under her idly clasped hands fell to the ground unnoticed.

‘I argue no more,’ she cried impetuously, ‘if the woman’s happiness is not worth considering.’

‘How unfair,’ he answered, smiling a little at her vehemence, ‘when it was I who said that the woman’s happiness was of necessity dependent on the man, and that for that reason the man—’

‘And the man’s,’ she interrupted, ‘is not dependent on the woman! It seems to me we have talked in a circle, and arrived

exactly where we began—namely, that men can do very well without us.'

'You are too quick,' he said. 'I cannot keep up with you, but I think you know where we were agreed all the same.'

'It is the English,' she answered, evasively; 'if we were both speaking our own language, we should understand one another better.'

'Perhaps.'

'Here is father,' she went on, turning towards where Mr. Loraine had appeared on the threshold between the two doors. She went a few steps towards him, and took his hand in hers, the little mutinous expression fading as she looked at him, her eyes growing soft and sweet.

'You are just in time, father; Count Lindenheim and I went on arguing until we were on the verge of quarrelling—at least I was.'

'And what was the point of difference?'

'Woman, down-trodden woman. I was defending her, and insisting on her rights.'

'Not her *rights*, Sydney—her privileges.'

'I do not like them accorded as privileges; still, I am not proud—'

'And you would rather not do without them? Well, ring for lights, and fetch the chess-board. Home, Sydney,' he went on, 'should be a Court, ruled by a King and Queen, and then there would arise no question as to which were rights and which were privileges.'

'No, father,' she retorted; 'home should be a Court where there is *only* a Queen—and a Prime Minister.'

'I dare say that would insure peace.'

'Well, at least it has done so in our case.'

Mr. Loraine had seated himself in a low armchair, and having so spoken, Sydney leant over the back, and lightly kissed his grey head. Then lifting her smiling eyes to the tall, fair man, who stood watching her, 'Poor father,' she said gently, 'he has never even found out that I rule him.'

'But it is all for my own good, child, is it not? That is why I don't complain. Now go and sing "Yesterday;" I am waiting to hear it.'

'Ah, you should not have gone to write, father,' she said, her voice losing its light tones, and growing quick and earnest, 'and

then you would have heard Count Lindenheim play. Such music!—clasping her hands together—‘it was fairyland.’

‘Better than fairyland,’ answered Mr. Loraine. ‘I was listening also, and if you do not believe me, go and look at my manuscript, and see how few words I have added to it. That is the charm of music,’ he went on, turning to the young man; ‘it comprises everything. You shut your eyes, and yet see pictures, and hear voices, and they are always pictures you wish to see—voices whose tones you are longing to hear.’

Sydney had turned away towards the piano, but, as Mr. Loraine ceased speaking, with a few quick steps she came back to his side.

‘That is how we have both thanked you,’ she said swiftly, her hand on the old man’s, her grey eyes lifted to the younger. ‘We have both told you that you showed us a magic country; you see we felt, though we could not speak.’

‘And I can only say,’ he replied, ‘that it seems to me a great thing to have been entrusted with the key that threw open the gates.’ He found himself looking with a sort of pathetic interest at the old man’s sad eyes, to whom had been conjured up a vision of his buried past, at the girl’s glad eyes that had had a glimpse into what was veiled from her eager view in the coming time, and then the momentary emotion that had touched all three subsided, and he became aware that he was still holding Sydney’s fan, which he had picked up when it fell from her careless hold. He gave it back to her with a light warning, ‘You are brave; do you know that peacock’s feathers are proverbially unfortunate?’

She took it in her hand, touching the feathers caressingly.

‘Ah, but I am not afraid of the especial misfortune that they are said to bring!’

‘And what is that?’ asked Mr. Loraine.

She turned with a little curtsey to her father. ‘The daughters, sir, of the house do not marry.’

‘And you mean to accomplish your destiny in spite of the peacock?’

‘On the contrary, I mean to accept with equanimity my destiny, and cling to my peacock’s feathers, and my Prime Minister.’

‘You are a wise woman,’ replied her father, ‘and, for the third and last time, I ask for my song.’

Without another word she sat down at the piano in the darker corner of the room.

‘No, thank you, I do not require a light,’ in answer to Count Lindenheim’s offer of candles; ‘I am going to sing a little song that I know by heart. It is father’s present favourite, and I hope, as I sing it to him nearly every night, that it gives him pleasant dreams.

To-day—ah! well,

To-day is fair;

But need I tell

What softer air,

Fresh as the morning breath of May,

Blew from the hills of yesterday?

Sweet yesterday!

With reaching hands,

I gaze away

Across the sands,

To see if somewhere I may find

A careless trifle left behind.

A leaf, windblown,

That fluttered by,

When all alone,

The woods and I;

A soft rose that I used to wear

In the bright beauty of my hair.

The tender eyes

That smiled in mine;

If those dear eyes

Again might shine,

And I might find along the way

The heart that loved me yesterday.

Oh, love! oh, loss!

No use, tired hands

To reach across

The fading sands;

They are not there, the gifts that lay

In the white arms of yesterday.

When she had finished there was a few seconds’ silence, then Count Lindenheim walked over to the darkened corner by the piano, and—

‘Have you the words?’ he asked; ‘I should like to read

them, for my English is not strong enough for me to understand English songs.'

'They are here,' she replied, 'if you can read my writing.'

He took the little manuscript book to the light.

'They are pretty,' old Mr. Loraine remarked, 'though perhaps you are not old enough to think so. Young people like to imagine that sorrow, pretty sentimental sorrow, of course, is being borne in the present, or coming in the future. When you are as old as I am, you will like to know that it is past. Eh, Lindenheim?'

But Count Lindenheim was looking thoughtfully before him, and did not at once answer. Then, 'I don't think, sir,' he said, 'that those who have reached to the point of looking back to yesterday have much sympathy as a rule with those who are struggling through to-day. To-day will some day be yesterday to us.'

'You are right, perhaps. Somehow, as we grow older, things do seem to be trifles, which of course they are not; but it is written, you know, that the Great Things of to-day are the Trifles of to-morrow.'

'Do you think, father,' interposed Sydney, 'that the point of view ever alters to ourselves? I should be inclined to translate that sentence into "Our great things always seem trifles seen through other people's spectacles."

'Well, my dear, in that case it is a pity we cannot borrow their spectacles; we might get a fairer and pleasanter view of life then. And perhaps it is not necessary to go further, but just to borrow yours.'

'Well, you might do worse. My glimpses of the world are generally of a very bright and sunny place, with just enough shadow to make the sunshine welcome.'

'Keep your spectacles,' said the old man, kissing her for good night; 'I am too old to use them. They are only suited for the eyesight of those who believe in them.'

CHAPTER II.

‘IT TAKES SO LITTLE TO MAKE EARTH A HEAVEN.’

A FORTNIGHT had passed, and Esmé von Lindenheim still remained at Hayes. He was Sydney’s constant companion. Together they sat out in the garden, under the shade of the tulip, during the long, hot afternoons; together, later, they would pass to the terrace which lay on the other side of the house—the terrace where, in the rays of the setting sun, the peacocks strutted up and down in all the pride engendered by the consciousness of fine feathers. They would lean on the low wall facing the glory of sunset, looking across the level English meadows, through which flowed the river, taking on its glassy breast the reflecting gleams of red and gold from the sky above, and admiring, often in silence, the glories of heaven, which seemed finding a reflection in the waters beneath.

The first few days they had read much, talked of the work which was the connecting link between the friends—the work in which the son of the one and the daughter of the other had so easily found a meeting place; and from that they had diverged to books generally, and a comparison of what they had read and liked.

‘Father,’ Sydney had said, entering the library the day after Count Lindenheim’s arrival, and cautiously closing the door behind her, ‘where is Schiller? You know I told you that it was poetry, not tennis, he would require to amuse him. Well, he has already proved me right. He is going to read aloud to me, and of course—’

‘Is going to read Schiller,’ interposed Mr. Loraine. ‘Here it is.’

‘I hope,’ replied Sydney, smiling, ‘he will not choose “The Glove,” though I suppose there is very little use hoping. They all begin with that. At least, that is the result of my large experience.’

‘You are very ungrateful, my dear Sydney,’ was her father’s comment, as he put the book into her hands.

But fifteen days had passed since then. Poetry had been abandoned for conversation, sometimes indeed for silence, whilst Sydney sat and worked. And it was not only with Miss Loraine

that Count von Lindenheim had made himself something more than a casual visitor. Old Mr. Loraine had grown to find his presence very welcome. His gentle courtesy always pleased him, and the interest with which he entered into his work, and the affectionateness with which he would walk up and down with him in the summer twilight, listening to the stories of long ago, brought back, in a measure, his youth to the older man.

‘The sun is setting, mademoiselle, he has deserted the garden, and it grows chilly. Let us follow him to the other side of the house.’

At the sound of the voice with the little foreign accent that she had learnt to know so well, Sydney Loraine rose to her feet, and put down her book.

‘It is you,’ she said. ‘Where have you been these one, two, three hours?’

‘I have been for a long walk,’ was his reply.

‘All alone?’

‘All alone. I have been thinking.’

‘And could you not think here? It would have been very much cooler and pleasanter.’

‘Cooler and pleasanter,’ he repeated, ‘but it would not have been thinking. But now, come quickly, let us go to the terrace.’

The light smile had died away that had been visible when she first spoke, and she was quite grave as she accompanied him. In silence for a few minutes. And then, as if shaking off the shadowy anxiety: ‘What a sun-worshipper you are!’ she said. ‘You are never happy unless he is shining down upon you. Do you feel the cold very much?’

‘Very much. I only live in the summer.’

‘You are not strong,’ she said, more as if stating a fact than asking a question.

‘I am much stronger than I was,’ he answered, evasively.

She looked up at him quickly, as if to read the truth of his words in his face. But she did not speak. Neither did he, though he did not turn his eyes away, but let them rest on hers.

She hesitated a second, then gave a quick little sigh. But, ‘It is a pity for a man not to be strong,’ was all she said.

‘It makes their lives more difficult,’ he answered.

They were standing now on the broad terrace, up and down

which peacocks were flaunting, apparently well pleased with the attention they were exciting, Sydney in her white dress and large shady hat, her grave eyes looking steadily over the meadows beneath, far away to where shone the river in the sunlight. Not once did she lift them to the man standing beside her, with fair, uncovered head, his eyes following the direction of hers.

At last : 'Let us go down,' he said. 'Down to the river, I mean. We shall not be able to do it very much oftener.'

'And why?' she interrupted, lifting her eyes swiftly.

'Oh, the weather will change—or I shall be gone. Everything comes to an end.'

'Everything comes to an end,' she repeated softly. 'Is that so, I wonder? It is rather a hard world, is it not, when one comes to think that that is the text of it?'

He did not answer.

Down by the river the glory of the sunset was beginning to fade, and a faint grey shadow seemed to haunt the river. The only sign of life was a tall, black-robed woman's figure across the water, wending her homeward way over the fields—dark and distinct against the sky; and a smaller dark figure of a child, that ran about hither and thither searching for flowers, heedless of its mother.

'It is sad,' Sydney said. 'Somehow, the moment of sunset is always a little suggestive of death—loneliness—sadness. One feels something has been taken out of our life.'

'Mademoiselle.'

It was no answer to her words, no comment on them that was coming. The tones were a little excited—a certain thrill in them which seemed to presage the coming of something special.

Sydney turned her head with a certain consciousness of the unusualness of his voice, and almost instinctively took a step away from him, shaking off her dreaminess as she did so. But as she so moved, before his next word reached her, there rang through the still summer evening air a shrill, terrified scream, that, before it had time to die away, was caught up and echoed in a woman's agonised tones, and then : 'It is the child!' Sydney cried. 'Oh, see!' pointing to where a small dark head showed on the smooth current. Then she was aware, in a misty, uncertain fashion—for eyes and brain for the moment alike seemed clouded—that the man beside her had moved forward to the edge of the steep bank that formed the border of the river, and that she—was it indeed

she?—with hands tight-clasped about his arm, was imploring him to stay. Was it her own voice? ‘Not you. Oh, do not go!’

She felt the hold of her hands loosened. It seemed to her she felt also a light kiss upon them ere they were released, and then they were hanging down by her side, and she was standing straight and tall on the bank, the sun shining broadly down, and she realised, all in a moment, that she, in her white gown, and that other black-robed figure opposite, were both alike standing, one on either side of the river, waiting and praying for the life that was dearest to them on earth.

But though she felt it she did not move, did not even clasp her hands, could not even think. Past and to come, even the present, seemed vague and undefined compared with the golden sunlight that was writing her love in letters of fire across the evening sky and green meadows, even in a faint reflective fashion, on the surface of the flowing water.

He was across now—the little dark-headed child was safe in its mother’s arms; the blonde-haired man was holding the mother’s hand, and listening doubtless to the words that her love and gratitude prompted.

And now through the sunlight, a little flame of gold all about him, he had turned quickly away towards the bridge, that half a mile off formed the connecting link between Hayes and the village of Morland.

And as he thus turned away, thought and the power of movement seemed to return to her.

Her first instinct was to try and realise what she had said and done in these last few moments; her second, to hasten towards her home and the protecting presence that there awaited her. There was something calming in the thought of the kind old man to whom her advent was never unwelcome.

So, obeying it after that moment’s hesitation, she turned homewards, stepping lightly over the short meadow grass. The sun had now very nearly set, and the low-lying fields were growing grey and misty, the reds and yellows slowly fading from the sky, and their fainter reflection from the broad river beneath.

She did not stop until she stood by Mr. Loraine’s side; then, having told him the story, and bidden him go and meet Count Lindenheim, she went on to her own room. Only there, in that haven of safety, did she feel able to think, though even in that secure

retreat consecutive thought was difficult. Standing by the window, round which the roses clustered, with hands clasped together, she strove to put into words that which was troubling her.

'I was frightened,' she said half aloud. 'I am more excitable than I thought. Yes, that was it. For the moment, I was really frightened.'

But all the time she knew that it had not been that.

She lingered on, some feeling of nervousness prompting her, until her watch told her it was five minutes past the dinner hour, and it required a certain amount of courage to open the door and enter the drawing-room. She was conscious of an unaccustomed colour in her cheeks, and of the quickened beats of her heart, and it was only a minute later, with a sigh that might have been relief, she realised that her father was its only occupant.

'He is not coming down,' Mr. Loraine said, in reply to her inquiring look. 'I have persuaded him to go to bed; it is much wiser. Come,' taking the girl's hand in his, 'you must come down to dinner with me instead.'

'Is he ill?' she questioned.

'He was shivering and miserable; it is always better to take care.'

'Don't you think he looks very delicate?' she asked, when they sat down—they two alone together as they had done so often; and yet to-night the room seemed strangely empty without him.

'Yes, I should say he was. And he should be careful, for his mother died of consumption. From what he tells me, he has been very ill himself. And under the circumstances, a plunge into a cold river at sunset, and a long walk afterwards in wet clothes, is not likely to do him any good. So I ordered what I thought was best.'

Sydney did not immediately reply. She clasped her hands tightly together, with a momentary pain at her heart, and then: 'It was very wise and thoughtful, father,' she said. 'It is always better to take too much care than too little.'

Dinner over, she returned at once upstairs. She felt restless and ill at ease; and leaving her father in the library, when she had seen him established at his writing-table, she opened the door of communication, and, passing through, entered the drawing-room. It seemed to her that in this long, empty apartment, with

no one to speak to her or watch her, she could bring herself back to calm.

The only light fell from a shaded lamp at the further end of the room, in the corner where stood the piano; but having closed the door behind her, she became immediately aware that she was not alone, as she had expected to be—that a man's figure stood by the open window, looking down on to the dusky garden.

‘Count Lindenheim!’ she spoke very low, but he heard her, and turned his head at once.

‘You are here,’ he said quickly. ‘I wait for you. I wish much to speak to you.’

‘But it is very foolish;’ her voice was still soft and low, and she moved a few steps nearer to him, ‘and you are standing by the open window. How unwise! Come away, please.’

She went on into the corner by the piano, and seating herself at it, pointed to a low chair beside her.

‘Sit down,’ she said, in tones more like her usual voice, ‘then you cannot deceive me. I can judge for myself how foolish you are.’

‘No, I do not wish to deceive you,’ he answered. ‘I have caught cold, I am certain, but that we can speak of afterwards. First, there is something else. I wished to say it to you this afternoon, and then—’

‘Yes,’ she said softly, ‘tell me now.’ She was no longer excited. The hands that held the peacock's feathers did not tremble, only her eyes did not meet his.

‘I,’ he began. He stopped abruptly, then rose up and took a few steps and back again, until he stood behind her chair, and there again paused, and rested his hands on the back, as if to steady himself. ‘I don't know why I have not told you before,’ he began; ‘it has not been from any wish to keep it to myself, but—I am engaged.’

The empty room seemed to echo the words, hold them, and repeat them for full a moment's breathless silence. A moment, whilst the hold on her fan loosened, and she clasped her hands tightly together, and then she spoke. All the softness had gone out of her grey eyes, her voice even had grown hard and defiant.

‘And why should you tell me now? A man is not called upon to confess his private affairs unless he is inclined.’

‘You ask—but you know. Look at me, and tell me it is so.’

Almost involuntarily she turned her head, and looked up at

him; but having done so steadily, her eyes wavered a little from those above her. ‘You must go,’ then she said abruptly, but still not lifting her eyes to his. It was never a fault of Sydney Loraine’s to avoid a difficulty; it was almost impossible for her to ignore it, even when perhaps more worldly wisdom would have been displayed in skirting it by. ‘You have been here long enough. You must return’—there was a second’s pause—‘to the woman you love.’

‘Ah, but,’ the words came quickly and passionately, ‘the woman I love is here!’

‘You will not think so when you are at home again: you will soon forget. A fortnight,’ bitterly, ‘is not much out of a man’s life.’

‘If you think that—do you?—yes,’ as she did not speak, ‘why should you not?—then there seems nothing more to say.’

He took his hands off the back of her chair, and moved away to the window, where he had been standing when she entered, and there threw himself down into a chair, covering his face with his hands.

She watched him, still in silence, and noted, as the dim uncertain twilight fell upon him, how ill and haggard he looked, noted also how thin the hands were in which he had hidden his face.

‘I do *not* think it,’ she cried, quickly and impetuously, following him and standing by his side; ‘I am cruel.’ Then, as he still did not move, of a sudden she knelt down by his side in soft abandonment, and laid her hand on his arm. ‘I am cruel,’ she repeated, ‘but it is because I am hurt myself, and,’ her voice faltering, ‘you know it, you know it.’

At the touch on his arm, at the sound of the soft voice, from which had died out alike the hardness and the defiance, Count Lindenheim lifted his bent head, and then laid his hand caressingly on the one which lay upon his coat-sleeve.

‘Ah,’ she cried, anxiously, ‘how feverish you are!—your hands are burning. Father said you were ill. How wrong of you not to take more care!’

‘You are good to care,’ he answered. His words seemed to recall her to herself. She rose to her feet, standing beside him tall and slender.

‘I care a great deal,’ she said, gravely, ‘so much that I will

not listen to the story to-night, but will wait to hear it until you are quite strong and rested after a night's sleep. But, 'swiftly, 'you will tell me to-morrow ?'

'I will tell you now,' he answered, rising also. 'Give me your hand. Do you believe that it was from no wish to hide anything that I did not tell you before ?'

She did not answer in words, but neither did she take her hand from his.

'This afternoon,' he went on, 'I made up my mind to go, and then——' He hesitated. 'I thought at first I need say nothing—that I would go, and that I was the only one who need suffer.'

'But this afternoon,' she interposed, 'you thought that I should suffer too—is it not so?—and therefore you made up your mind to tell me. It was better, kinder,' she added slowly, clasping both hands about his. 'It is foolish, wrong perhaps, to say so, but do not reproach yourself; I never shall. Even if you go, and I never see you again, I shall remember how happy I have been. I did not understand it before, but now I do. I understood it, I think, this afternoon, and now'—the steady voice faltered—'now I have only to learn how to live without you.'

He turned away, drawing his hands from hers, and sat down again, his eyes turned towards the dark, silent garden.

'I can say nothing'—and his voice sounded hoarse and difficult; 'but if I regain my freedom, may I come back ?'

She clasped and unclasped her hands, as if she were in pain, and it was a moment before she spoke.

'Perhaps it would be better not to think of it,' she answered. 'It has been a mistake. There will be difficulties and pain anyway. It will, I dare say, come right for you——' And then, breaking off, and her tones growing quick and passionate, 'I cannot say it, I cannot,' coming a step nearer to him, and laying her hand on his shoulder. 'Oh, Esmé, I cannot live without you ! Do not leave me. I love you, I love you !'

At the sound of the passionate words he half turned, holding out his arms, but, recovering herself, Sydney stepped back.

'Forgive me,' she began, 'I am unhappy. I did not mean to speak like that. I want to ask you other things. Tell me,' her voice falling, 'who is she? Have you—have you known her long ?'

'The greater part of my life. She is a ward of my father's.'

'Tell me more,' as he paused, 'do not fear to talk to me.'

You see for yourself I am quite calm again, and I should like to know everything. Oh, it will come right again, never fear!—for you, I mean, when you go home, if you have known her and loved her so long. This will then seem an interlude.'

He turned his eyes, full of pain, towards her, where she stood above him.

'I can say nothing,' he said, as he had said once before; and, as the words had touched her then, so they touched her now.

'Do not mind me,' she cried, quickly—'do not heed my words. I am jealous, you see, that she should have been so much to you, and for so long, and that I should only have known you for a fortnight. It is jealousy, miserable jealousy. But, Esmé, she would forgive me, I think, even if she learns all this in the future—if she knew, also, how much I have suffered to-night.'

'And I too. You know that, do you not? And it is all my fault. My suffering, and yours, and—all the previous mistake—there is no one to be blamed but myself.'

'It was a mistake,' she repeated, drearily. 'Ah, why do men make such mistakes? Tell me'—speaking low and breathlessly—'did you love her? What am I saying? Of course you did! You have told her so hundreds of times—and—only a month ago!'

She was standing in the embrasure of the window, and she wrung her hands together with a certain despairing gesture, born of her pain and her despair. Hearing her, Count Lindenheim stood up, and, coming nearer, put his arm about her. He was so tall that when he held her thus in his firm hold she was powerless to move.

'Listen,' he said, in clear, determinate tones, and with one burning hand over her clasped ones. 'You *shall* hear me once, and you *shall* believe me. Do not taunt me with the past; it was a mistake. I shall go back to her, I shall tell her so. She is a good woman; she will give me back my freedom. If she does'—his arm was now clasped more tightly about her—'I will come back, and I will remind you of to-night—of your tender words, your tender looks.'

'And if she will not?' It was Sydney's voice that asked the question—Sydney's voice, so low that he had to bend his head to hear what she said.

She felt the clasp of his hand tighten, but his voice was steady

as he answered, 'Then in some happy future you must forget me.' But his voice faltered as he spoke.

'I cannot, I cannot,' she cried, and he felt the quickened heartbeats, the passionate vibration in her voice. 'Oh, come back to me!'

'When I come back,' he answered, 'I will say all to you that I am forbidden to say to-night. When I come back,' his voice losing its determination and growing tender and loving, 'I will ask for the kiss that I will not take to-night. Now, I will only,' putting her at a little distance from him—'I will only look at you once more, and ask you to trust me. It will not be for very long, but trust me until you see me again. Will you promise?'

'I promise,' she answered. 'Do not believe me except when I say that I trust you, and will trust you until I see you again.'

He shivered a little after her words, and it served to remind her of what she had wellnigh forgotten.

'You ought not to be here,' she said, tenderly. 'You know you promised that, if I would listen to what you had to say, you would take care of yourself afterwards. And it is not taking care staying in this cold, dark room—is it?'

'I am happy here,' he answered—he was walking restlessly up and down the long room—and who knows——' But his words were cut short by a cough. 'Don't scold me,' he said, breathlessly; 'I told you I had caught cold. I will go to bed, and begin to take care, or I shall not be fit for my journey to-morrow.'

'I do not think you will be fit anyhow,' she answered, looking anxiously at him, 'but it is as well to try. So good night; I am going back to father.'

He took her hand in his. 'Good night,' he said; then of a sudden, kneeling before her, he lifted it to his lips.

'You are good,' she said, gently, 'I am sure you are good. Forgive me if I have been unkind. It is only because I am so very, very unhappy.' And, with these words, she stooped and lightly kissed the fair bent head.

But the journey on which so much depended was not to be taken on the morrow. The Fates interposed, and Sydney Loraine scarcely knew whether to be most glad or sorry when she learnt in the morning that there was no chance of Count von Lindenheim leaving their house that day.

‘Or his room,’ Mr. Loraine added. ‘He has had a bad night, and is feverish and ill this morning. I hope,’ with unusual sharpness, ‘that Mrs. Robertson is sufficiently grateful for her imp, and will not encourage its flower-gathering propensities.’

Sydney, who was walking across the room, stooped and kissed the grey head.

‘Ah! she was grateful, father, we know that; and even we,’ with a little smile, ‘would not have had it otherwise. Although, after a moment’s pause, ‘there certainly are a great many children in the world.’

‘And only one Esmé von Lindenheim, eh?’

She did not answer; but a moment later began arranging some faint-scented cream-coloured roses and fern leaves in a glass.

‘You can take them up with you, father, when you go; it will show that he is not forgotten. And tell him that though I grieve for the reason, still I am glad he is not going away to-day. You are listening, father, you will not forget?’

‘Do I ever forget?’ And in proof that he did not, he brought her later on, to where she sat under the tulipa-tree idling, making no pretence even of working or reading, a folded slip of paper, on which was written in pencil his thanks, a few words in German, and below them his name—Esmé von Lindenheim.

‘You judge from that, I hope, that I did not forget, and that your message and flowers pleased him.’

And he still looked ill, when, three days later, he reappeared downstairs. The old doctor had come and given his advice. Rest and warmth, no more talking than was necessary, and, to insure all this, bed, that was by far the best place. He was interested in the stranger, as most people were who knew him, and he was not surprised that his hostess should follow him out on to the sunny terrace and ask what he thought, and if there were anything she could do.

‘No, no; quiet is the best thing, and this lovely weather is in his favour. His lungs are delicate, and with so much fever one always fears inflammation; but we must hope it won’t come to that.’

Her heart seemed to die within her as she stood in the golden sunlight, with the bright unclouded morning sky above her; but the kindly old eyes looking into hers saw no shadow of the pain there, heard no inflection of it in the tones of her steady voice.

'No,' she repeated, 'we must hope it will not come to that. You must take great care.'

'We can't let him owe his death to us,' the doctor said cheerily, turning away; 'we'll take too much care for that.'

At his words Sydney shivered, and felt cold through all the glory of the August sunshine.

'Though after all,' a shade of defiance in her thoughts as she made her way back to the garden, 'I am not really uneasy. Why should I be? He only needs care.'

But words did not banish the shadow of anxiety.

But now the days were over, had been lived through somehow; and on this Sunday evening in the long drawing-room, with the windows closed against possibly treacherous evening air, the lamps lighted, and a miniature wood fire burning on the wide, open hearth, Sydney sat in old Mr. Loraine's great armchair by the fireplace, Count von Lindenheim on a low seat by her side. They were alone, for after dinner Mr. Loraine had slipped into his beloved library, and after a time, the voices disturbing him, he had closed the door of communication. But now, though they were thus alone, they seemed to have but little to say, although the knowledge was theirs that to-morrow the parting so long postponed must take place.

'I would rather go,' Count Lindenheim had said. 'I am not getting well; I am worried, for I ought to be at home. I shall not get well here.' And the doctor had given a somewhat unwilling consent for his departure, seeing the truth of his words.

So this was the last night. Sad, in as far as it was the last, and yet to Sydney there was, mingled with the sadness, a feeling that his presence was an unexpected happiness, wrested from fate itself.

She had been restless and unhappy all day. Even the quiet services in the village church had failed to calm her. The last time, even with a distinct and definite knowledge of when and where we shall meet again, is sad. How much more when a terrible mist of uncertainty lies on the other side of the 'Good-bye.' And in calmer moments she did not deceive herself. She was well aware of the nature of a German betrothal—that only the marriage service itself could be held more binding. And knowing it, there were moments when she felt it graven on her heart—that in this world, at least, she and Esmé von Lindenheim would meet no more.

But this was not one of them. At this moment past fears and future anxiety were alike swallowed up in a blissful, happy present.

There was always something about him that calmed her. His gentleness, his tenderness soothed and comforted her; and this seemed magnified tenfold by the increased delicacy of his appearance. He himself was not so depressed and unhappy as he had been when she had seen him last. The consciousness that he was no longer obliged to wait, but was starting to-morrow, had perhaps acted as a stimulant to his nerves; and in his smile and conversation she felt the personal charm that had been so strong at first. For him it was the day before the battle, and there was something of the thrill of coming excitement. Something, perhaps, in being once more in the presence of the woman whose love he need not doubt of having won. It would be a hard and bitter fight, but she was worth it—or so it seemed to him as he watched her in the big armchair, which was associated in his memory with old Mr. Loraine. She wore the same white dress that she had done the night of his arrival; its folds fell softly and gracefully about her, and in her hand was the fan of peacock's feathers.

'Are you really better?' she asked suddenly, after a long silence, in which she had been watching him. 'Tell me the truth; you are not quite well'—a faint question in the tones—'but you are much better?'

'I am not quite well,' he repeated, sitting more upright, 'but I am much better, and shall be better still when I am back in Germany.'

'Yes,' she said, softly, 'I hope so.'

He laid his hand on the feather fan on her knee.

'Your hopes and wishes will do me good,' he said, 'never fear.' And then, suddenly—'I wish you would get another fan,' he went on. 'I cannot bear to see you carrying this one about with you.'

'It is pretty,' touching it caressingly, 'and it has memories. It reminds me of many happy evenings. You told me it was unlucky, you remember, the first time I saw you.'

'And you,' he replied, 'said you did not fear the especial form of ill-luck it might bring.'

'But I do,' she cried passionately, rising to her feet. 'I am afraid of it—I am afraid to run any risks,' moving swiftly away,

and placing it on a distant table. 'There,' returning to his side, 'I will never touch it again.'

'What a foolish woman you are!' he said gently, as she stood once more by his side.

'I cannot help it,' she cried, and when he looked at her he saw there were tears in her eyes. 'I care too much to be wise! I wish——' she began abruptly, and then turned away, and stood with her back to him, leaning against the mantelshelf.

'What do you wish?' he questioned.

'Oh, I wish I had seen her—that I knew her—even what she is like.'

He did not answer in words, but rose and left the room, and a few minutes later came up to where she was still standing by the fire, and placed in her hands a small case.

She took it over to a distant lamp, and there opened it. And when she had done so, a fair girl's face looked frankly out towards her, blue-eyed and red-lipped, with rippling corn-coloured hair. For some seconds she remained gazing at it, with jealous, misty eyes, scanning every line of the girlish face, which was not beautiful, but true and honest. Then she closed the case, and came back to his side.

'Tell me,' she said, her voice sinking to a whisper, 'does she love you?'

There was no reply.

'Of course she does,' her words coming quickly, unsteadily. Then sinking on her knees by him: 'It is at her expense that I am wishing to be made happy. But you will go back; and it will come right—between you and her, I mean. You see it is not your happiness I care for—it is just my own,' clasping her hands tightly about his arm. 'I do not want you to be happy with her, I want you to come back to me.'

Her voice faltered, and she laid her head where her hands were clasped about his arm, and burst into tears.

He spoke soothing words, and stroked her soft hair caressingly, as if she had been a child, trying to calm the unaccustomed storm.

At length she lifted her miserable eyes to his.

'Do not despise me,' she sighed. 'Dear Esmé,' laying her cheek against his hand, 'I am only jealous, that is it,' with a faint smile, 'jealous. And there is always something despicable about jealousy. And I made such good resolutions to-day—and in

church too—that I would not spoil your last evening with my excitability and folly. I meant to be so calm and wise. And now—'

‘Dear child,’ he said gently, ‘dear child,’ smoothing her ruffled brown hair caressingly, ‘do not be afraid. If I live, I will come back—or write?’ he added, interrogatively.

‘No, no,’ she replied softly, ‘do not write. Come back to me if you are free, and if not—’ her voice dying away into sad indefiniteness—‘oh, I shall understand! It will not be necessary even to write. But get well,’ she went on, ‘that is the first and most important thing. When I next see you, let me find you quite well.’

Her voice was steady now. She had brushed the tears away. Perhaps his words had inspired her with a faint shadow of hope, perhaps some remembrance had come to her of the resolutions she had formed whilst listening to the bells ringing through the calm summer evening—resolutions which in her passionate pain and suffering she had broken—that she would spare him as much as might be any share of the trouble which had fallen on her; he had quite enough to bear himself, and he was ill. And over and over again had not the doctor said that all worry and anxiety, and above everything all excitement, was, if possible, to be avoided? And she knew it. As she looked at him now, and noted the little red flush on his cheeks and the feverish brightness of his eyes, she knew that it was through her fault, her foolish emotion, that he was suffering afresh. What was the good in crying out? She was hurt, perhaps, but, as they were circumstanced, there was nothing he could do, only feel as a stab all her passionate words.

She did not move. The attitude in which she was—she was still half kneeling, half leaning against his chair—was restful. With her face hidden in her hands, thoughts and prayers rushed through her mind, which seemed growing calmer, the after-result of the tempest which had shaken her.

The hand upon her head seemed to bring peace. He was always, outwardly at least, so much more calm than she was, that his mere presence was restful.

Gradually the shadowy quiet appeared to increase to a reality, the quickened beats of her heart to grow slower, the uneven breathing calmer. The bright flames of the wood fire sparkled and danced before her tired eyes, as she watched them with a kind

of fascination. So silent grew the room, that its little crackles were the only disturbing sound.

It seemed almost as if that passionate pain she had borne these last days was separated from her now by another lifetime, and that she had entered into the kingdom for which she had yearned. Her lips parted, and a little sigh escaped her. Joy, sorrow, which was it, that brought it there?

‘I wish,’ she began at length—but she did not move her cheek away from the hand against which it rested—‘I wish sometimes one could choose the moment of one’s death; I think I should say now. To-morrow I shall be so unhappy, but now, at this moment—I have forgotten that.’

‘Forget it still,’ he answered; ‘and believe me, if I can make the future easy for you, I will.’

‘Putting it into words has broken the charm,’ she said. ‘But you see for yourself that my wisdom has come back. Do not fear, I am not going to make you miserable any longer. I am going,’ tightening a little her clasp upon the hand she held, ‘to say “Good night”—for you promised you would not stay up late.’

‘It is “Good bye,”’ he replied quickly. ‘I am going early to-morrow. No,’ as she would have spoken, ‘it is better, far better. You know, I wished to go days ago. I think,’ his voice faltering a little, ‘I would rather not say “Good-bye” again.’

‘I will not again break my resolution,’ she said. ‘I will do whatever you think best. I am not very brave, but I can be obedient.’

She stood up as she spoke, and ‘See,’ she went on, ‘I am trying to act as I speak. I am going at once. This is “Good-bye.”’

He was standing beside her on the hearthrug, looking down into her troubled eyes, noting the slender hands clasped above her beating heart, perhaps recognising the efforts she was making to be calm, for his own eyes grew sadder as he watched her.

But his voice was quiet and steady, as, placing his hands upon her shoulders: ‘Sydney,’ he said, ‘try and trust me. If I live, I will come back; if I do not come back, I will write. Do you understand?’

‘Yes,’ It was a sigh, not a word. Her eyes did not droop—they looked steadily up into his. The tear-drops were all gone. There was a faint reflection of his calmness and determination about her grave mouth.

‘Dear child,’ with one hand smoothing back the hair from her aching forehead, ‘I can say so little. You know, you understand. If you never see me again, you must be free, with no shadow between you and a happy future.’

‘Ah, but you cannot do that,’ she interposed. ‘You may destroy my future, but you cannot take away my past. And I would not have it otherwise, do not think it. I shall always believe that you loved me.’

‘You *cannot* doubt. But,’ breaking off, ‘you believe me, that is enough. You believe,’ speaking quickly, ‘that if I could say all I wish to say, if I could kiss away your tears, and bring back smiles to your eyes and lips, there is nothing I would not sacrifice—nothing—if it were only myself I had to think of !’

As he spoke the colour swept up in a scarlet flame to her cheeks, and the grey eyes wavered away from those looking into hers.

‘Good-bye,’ she said, softly; ‘your love makes it easier.’

‘Good-bye,’ he repeated.

She lifted her eyes once more to his, and then turned slowly away. But, having reached the doorway, she paused and looked back.

He had thrown himself down in the big armchair where she had sat the earlier part of the evening, his face hidden in his arms outstretched on the table beside it—the whole attitude one of such suffering and despair, that almost involuntarily she paused. And, after a second’s hesitation, she came back the few steps to his side.

The circle of light from the shaded lamp fell on the prone head, turning to gold the fair hair, and for the moment such pity and tenderness filled her heart that all thought of self was swallowed up.

‘Esmé,’ she said, low and timidly, and, as he did not move or make any reply, ‘Good-bye is a bitter, heartbreaking word,’ she went on gently. ‘Does it comfort you to know that if you suffer, so do I; that if you are heartbroken, so am I? Does it comfort you—it must—to know that day and night I am praying God to keep you until we meet again?’

There was a moment’s silence; then Esmé von Lindenheim felt her arm about his neck, her soft kisses on hair and forehead.

‘Good-bye,’ she faltered, and ‘Good-bye’ he repeated, lifting his eyes, full of tears, to hers; and then he knew that if he did not regain his freedom he had looked his last into the grey eyes he had learnt to love, heard her say ‘Good-bye’ for the last time.

CHAPTER III.

'UND WAS DU EWIG LIEBST, IST EWIG DEIN.'

HAYES in August, under cloudless summer skies, roses and jasmine looking in at every window, was a very different place from Hayes on a cold wet day in May, with a wild west wind howling out of doors, dashing cold showers of rain against the windows, and making the warm, firelit drawing-room a very desirable place in which to listen to the warring elements without.

Up and down the long room, in the fashion that was familiar to them, walked Sydney Loraine and her father, talking occasionally, and then remaining silent, both thinking their own thoughts, in the way that long-tried affection only dare venture upon.

They had been in London for some weeks; it was only this afternoon they had returned, and Sydney was congratulating herself on being once more at home.

'It is so pleasant being alone, is it not, dear father? Do you know, I sometimes wonder if the rest of the world finds us as dull as we find it. What a comfort it is we never fail to interest and amuse each other!'

'I quite forgot to tell you, Sydney, that I asked Roy Carteret to come down here.'

'Why did you do that?'—Sydney half paused in her walk, but went on again directly—'I do not believe you forgot, I think you were afraid to tell me.'

'Do you not like him? Did you not wish him to come? I thought he interested you, and he has promised to take some sketches for me. But if I had thought—'

'Dear father, do not mind me. Of course I am glad you asked him. My remarks were general, not particular. Men are not, as a rule, very interesting.'

'But he is interesting,' went on Mr. Loraine, with unusual persistence. 'He is clever, amusing, and draws well; besides he has helped me a great deal in a way that has given him not a little trouble.'

'He is quite aware of his advantages,' Sydney replied, with a shade of bitterness in the tones that used not to be there. 'Sometimes, father, I think people know the value of everything belonging to them, including unselfishness and all their other

virtues. Now do not scold me for being uncharitable and hard. I say that to you, but to him I will be charming; interested and appreciative of everything, including sketches and unselfishness.'

Mr. Loraine's only reply in words was, 'I am glad you judge me more kindly than you do the world;' but for a few minutes his thoughts did not wander away to the subject of the new book, which was engrossing him at present, they remained with the tall, slender daughter, by whose side he was walking. Sometimes now, as he found himself growing older and his hair greyer, the thought would flash across him that if he could have seen her a proud and happy wife, with children clinging about her, the future would not have seemed so grey and dull, to which one day he would have to leave her.

'But though I used to wish she might not leave me I have never influenced her, and I would always have done anything for her happiness. It is she herself who has ever been unwilling to quit her home. She is capable of love, I know it, but somehow it seems that no man has ever been able to touch her heart.' But his thoughts being thus turned to the subject he sighed, when at the library door he paused and entered it.

'What a sigh father! That is forbidden,' kissing him. 'Are you going to write to-night? You ought to be too tired for that, but you grow two years younger every year, and I,' half smiling, 'two years older.'

'We shall soon be the same age at that rate. Come in and light my candles.'

'When does Mr. Carteret arrive?' she questioned, the taper in her hand.

'To-morrow about five. I promised we would send to meet him.'

She made no comment on his words, but, having lit the candles, returned to the drawing-room.

Back there, she stirred the fire into a brighter blaze, then recommenced her walk to and fro, noting as she walked, now and again with satisfaction, some familiar object that after the month's absence it was a pleasure to see again; but at length pausing in her slow walk, she sat down in the wide armchair on the hearth-rug, and pursued her train of thought with eyes fixed on the fire, as if she read a story there.

As she sits thus, her hands lightly clasped on her knee, the lamplight above her shows the changes that time has brought to

her. It is a different woman from the one in the white dress who faltered out her heart-broken farewells in this very room. The face is thinner than of old, and the lamplight shows grey hairs in the dark head; the grey eyes are a little harder, a little colder, and the grave mouth smiles less often than it did. The world with its disappointments and troubles has a way, hardening to those who have to fight many of its battles, and nearly five years have gone by since Esmé von Lindenheim said in this very room, 'If I regain my freedom I will return, if not I will write; ' and he had not returned, had not even written. One little note had come from him to Mr. Loraine posted from Berlin, thanking him for his kindness, telling him of his arrival so far.

'I am arranging for leave to go home at once.' A message of remembrance to his daughter, and that was all. From then till now silence so great, that not one word had reached her listening ears.

How often in those first six months, pacing up and down this room, winter storms raging without, and an echo of them within her heart, had she gone over and over all possible issues of that journey home !

Pride, passion, bitter jealousy all warring in her desolate heart, all telling her that the silence meant he had failed, and that he could not, or would not, write and say so.

'But I would rather know it, far rather, though I said I should understand.' And, mingled with the thoughts of her despair, would come remembrances of her own words, 'You will return to her, and then this will seem an interlude. Your love for her will all come back. What is a fortnight in a man's life? For you it will be all as it was before.'

'What is it?' she would cry, leaning out into the cold wintry night from the window where in the moonlight he had told her of his love. 'What is it? Tell me where you are, what you are doing!' And in the pain and grief of those winter nights the grey hairs were sown, the soft mouth forgot its smiles. Months had passed, months of which each day had seemed written in fire across her life, days of which the mere memory now would bring back the pain. Sometimes the sight of the familiar room, or of some slight object therein, would catch her eye, and, reminding her of that vanished time, make the whole scene so real that it was impossible to believe that blank months and years stretched between then and now. To-night, returning after this short

absence, the place was alive with memories, and, looking into the fireglow, her story seemed written there.

‘I am glad to be back,’ she said, softly; then, rising, walked over to the unshuttered window, and, opening it, looked out into the wild night. It was not cold. The strong west wind was driving dark clouds across the sky; now and again a momentary gleam of moonshine showing through the blackness, the trees beneath bending hither and thither in the gale.

‘Am I ever glad?’—altering the form of her sentence. ‘After all, what difference does it make? Here or there, it is always the same thing—only at first one always imagines every change must be for the better. If I only knew’—wringing her hands together; ‘I think anything would have been better than this terrible blank. Five years! Yes, it will soon be five years. And not to know whether he was faithful to his promise to her whilst I had his heart, or whether he gave it all back to her—his love, everything. Why not, why not?’

Then, a moment later, the passion dying out of her voice: ‘It is a long time ago, I must forget. Ah, no, no! that would be paying too dear.’ I would rather—yes, I would rather know that you were happy—even,’ smiling more softly, ‘with her. She looked good and kind; perhaps, when he saw her, he had not the courage to tell her, and so sacrificed himself—and me. Perhaps, better so. It would be something saved out of the wreck.’

She did not close the window, but resumed her pacing up and down; it seemed to bring back the calmness she needed.

‘I am old enough to be less excitable. It almost seems like those past foolish, happy days.’

Her thoughts then drifted to the visitor of whom her father had spoken, and she paused once again by the open window.

‘Why is he coming?’ she said, lifting her eyes to the dark sky. ‘I do not wish to see him,’ almost defiantly. ‘Though, after all, what difference does it make who comes or who stays away?’

But no shadow of the previous night was about her as, in the small morning-room, which looked on to the garden, she sat making tea the following evening for Mr. Carteret, the man of whose advent her father had spoken. He was a tall, dark-haired, dark-eyed man,—no greater contrast could have been found than between him and the fair-haired stranger who had won his

way into Mr. Loraine's heart so long ago. And yet this was the only man in whom Sydney could recall her father being much interested since.

'And it is selfish of me not to be very civil to him also,' she thought, 'for there are not many men who can share his tastes.'

Stirred by the thought, she roused herself to talk. The sketches proved a good introductory topic.

'To-morrow, if it is fine,' he said, with a glance at the rain pouring down out of doors, 'I shall go forth and explore the country; and if not, there are several drawings I should be glad to take from the house itself. The one of the opposite building—I should imagine the older part of the house, taken from the room above this—would make a charming picture.'

'I wish I could draw,' she interposed, 'for I should like to have just that bit. It is charming.—Ah, but,' with momentary enthusiasm, 'it should be done in summer, when the acacias are in leaf,—or on a starlit summer night,' her hands clasping and unclasping, 'it is a dream of loveliness then. I should like to have it.'

He looked at her as if surprised at the unwonted stir in the tones, but he saw she was not looking at him, and the softness vanished from her eyes, when, 'I will come down and do it for you,' he said. 'Show me what you would like, and I will do my very best.'

'Thank you, you are very kind,' she answered. 'But, unfortunately, you have to leave out of a picture the thousand scents of a summer night, the thousand gentle sounds which make it into a living reality. But it is kind of you to offer to do it for me, and I should value it. Some day, you know, I suppose, if I live long enough, I shall have to leave here, and a short stout man who hunts five days a week will take possession. And as he cannot hunt here, I don't suppose he will love it quite as much as I do.'

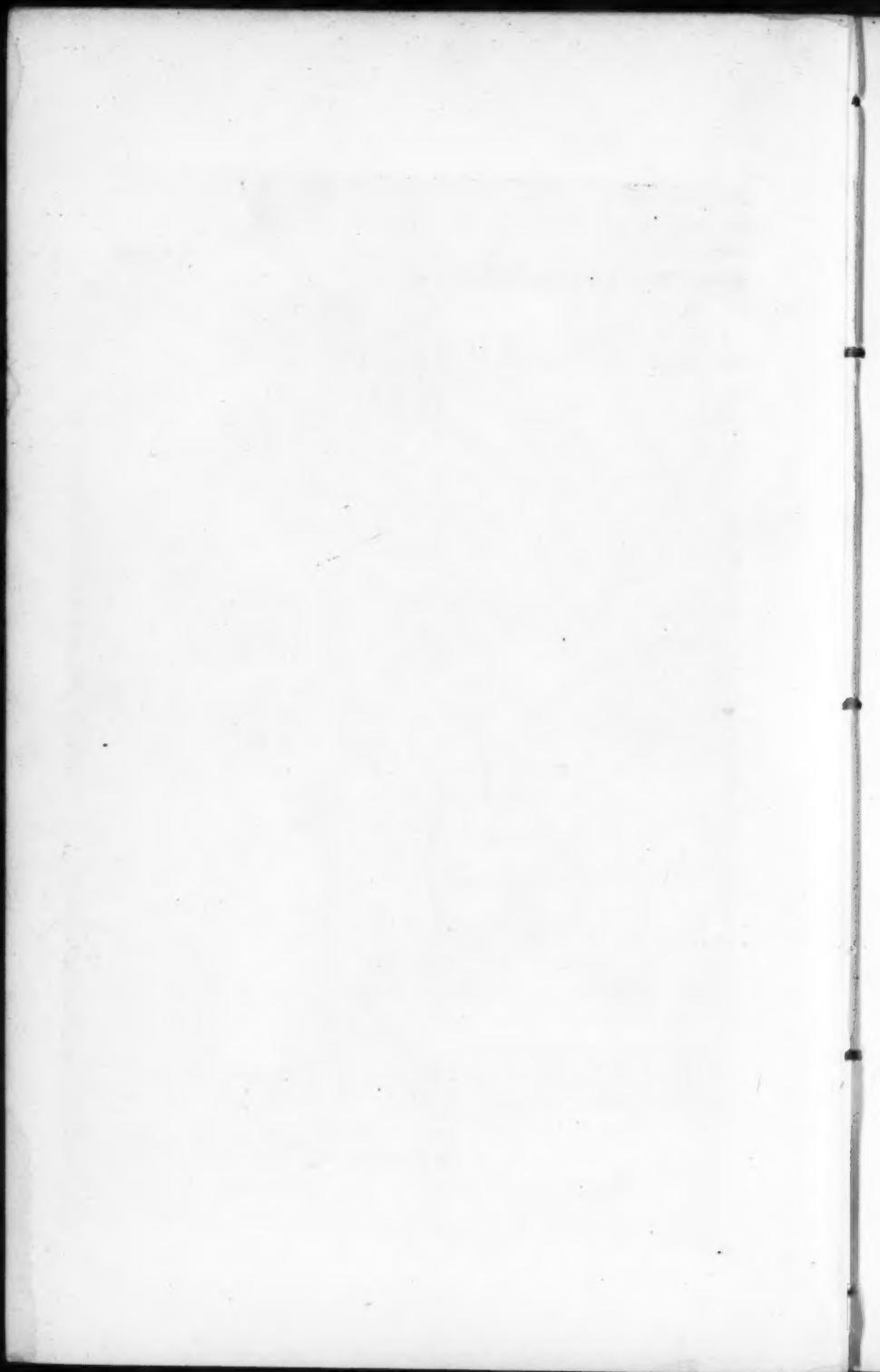
The momentary softness had entirely vanished. Sydney Loraine was as always, at least so Mr. Carteret found, a woman with whom it was very hard to sympathise, or indeed reach, in any way.

'It must always be a bitter thing to make a new home,' he said, and felt that it was a purely conventional phrase, which carried not the slightest weight.

'It must, I should think,' she answered. 'But, come, as it is so wet, we will explore the house now, and find bits suitable for your pencil.'

'I do not know why it is,' was his thought, as he followed her





about the house, 'I always feel sorry for her, though surely there is no need. Everyone says she is proud and cold, but I do not always think so. Sometimes it seems to me as if she would willingly take more interest, if she could. What stands between her and life? Is it that she is satisfied with the present, or is it that she has a past?'

Only he noticed, as he had always done, how in her father's presence she changed. Her very voice grew softer; when looking at him, the grey eyes became warm and tender.

But though he lingered on day by day, and saw her constantly; though she sat by him while he sketched, and listened to, and apparently appreciated, his remarks on the world of men and books, and though he sat by her in the evening, sometimes listening to her singing, sometimes talking while she worked, or listening to her words, now light, now serious—never once was the veil lifted; she was always exactly the same: kind and friendly, grateful to him for the help he afforded her father, and the interest he aroused in herself, with a little shaft of sarcasm always ready to turn aside the slightest attempt at anything that might lead to aught else, so that the words he meant to say, the words that hovered on his lips a hundred times a day, remained unsaid.

'Will you come for a walk?' he asked her one afternoon. It was late, nearly four o'clock, but it had rained all day, and she had not been out, and at the suggestion she rose at once.

'It would be very pleasant. It has stopped raining,' looking out of the window. 'I will put on my hat.'

Very little later they were making their way, against the blustering wind, through the narrow village street.

'Is it too rough for you?' he asked.

'No, I enjoy it,' she declared. 'We will go above to the pine-wood; I love the sound of wind in pine-trees.'

'You are sure it will not tire you?'

'It is staying at home and waiting that tires one,' she answered quickly. 'Do not you also think that?'

'I should think it must be so, but that is rarely a man's fate.'

'No, it is a woman's.'

He turned his head quickly. It sounded to him as if the words came with a sob, but perhaps the strong wind had caught her breath, for the road they were toiling up was very steep. He paused a moment, however.

‘There is no use offering you an arm,’ then he said. ‘You are far too independent to take it, even if you were tired.’

‘Even if I were tired,’ she repeated, ‘which I am not. But I am grateful all the same.’

‘No, you are not. Nothing that I could do for you, nothing that I could offer you, would you ever be grateful for. You would say “thank you” because it is conventional to say “thank you,” and you are too well-mannered to forget it.’

‘*Et après?*’

They had entered the little pine-wood, and sheltered there from the violence of the storm she stopped, leaning against a tall tree-trunk, and looked at him. The wind had brought a faint flush to her pale cheeks, some emotion, an unaccustomed brightness to her eyes. But when she had said her little light words, before he had time to answer them, she went on hurriedly——

‘Do not say anything more. That is all. Forgive me if I was flippant—I am sometimes; it is a terrible thing for a woman to be, but men probably have some other weapon with which they meet the world, and which serves the same purpose.’

‘Has the world disappointed you?’ he asked, ‘deceived you?’ slowly. ‘Why do you wish to meet it with stabs? Is it not a mistake to doubt everyone? If you trusted more,’ his dark eyes softening, ‘would not you be more likely to find your trust repaid?’

‘I?’ she replied, with a little laugh, which had a certain faint, bitter echo, ‘I trust the whole world—at a distance! Father and I make up a world, and we find there are quite enough inhabitants. We are happy in it!’

‘Happy?’ he repeated; ‘do you think I believe you? You know that I do not. You may deceive others, but you cannot deceive me. I have watched you so often and so long that, if you swore you were happy, I should only say you were striving to forget—to endure’—slowly, ‘which is it?’

His keen eyes were on her face; he noted the ebbing colour that the strong wind had brought to her cheeks—the one swift, imploring glance she turned, not towards him, but up to the dark pine-trees over her head; then her lids fell, and only her slightly-quicken breathing told that she had heard and felt his words.

‘Well, it is no concern of mine,’ he went on. ‘Be happy in your own way. You know what I came down here to say to you. You have put me off, day by day, but I could not go without saying it. My love is yours—has been yours, I think, since the

first day I saw you. There is no hope in my heart, but I could not go back leaving the words unsaid. You need not even answer them—what is there to answer? You can only reply you know it, and that you do not care for my love; but all the same it is yours, to do what you will with.'

He was a man who stood well in his own estimation, and also in that of the world—by that perhaps, in part, he judged himself; and yet he felt again the sensation that it was not the way he had intended to speak, that his words were against him, or was it merely that he was so anxious not to fail, that anything short of success must seem failure?

She moved a step away when he had spoken.

'You need not be afraid,' he said; 'I am going to say nothing more—nothing. And you need not move; you have the knack of making a man feel as if he stood so far off you, that his words could scarcely reach you.'

He spoke bitterly, and she lifted her eyes with something that might have been appeal in them; and her voice was a little unsteady as: 'Forgive me,' she answered; 'I do not mean to be unkind, but I can only say that I should not be happier married. No,' regaining steadiness of tone, 'do not say anything more; I should not like to lose your friendship.'

'That is for your father's sake, not for your own. But even on those terms, I would rather keep it, though it is not much.'

'You will forget,' she said.

'I do not think so,' he answered quietly, but he made no further protestations.

Almost in silence they returned. Under the circumstances it was difficult to prolong the walk, besides it was growing dusk, so they went back the way they had come. Making their way through the village street, a child gathering lilac from a bush at a cottage door, seeing them, ran towards them and caught hold of Miss Loraine's skirts.

'Little Dollie?' questioningly, and stopping; 'I am sure it must be you.'

Roy Carteret watched with something approaching jealousy the soft kiss on the child's face, the tender way she laid her hands on the rough dark hair.

'Dear little Doll, tell your mother to bring you up to see me to-morrow. I have been away. Are you not glad to see me back?'

The child looked up lovingly into the woman's face.

'I am glad,' she said. 'I will come to-morrow.'

'Good night.'

Then Miss Loraine turned with a word of apology to her companion.

'She is not hard, not cold,' he was thinking, as they continued their walk; 'it is impossible to believe it.'

And she was thinking how little Dollie Robertson had been a toddling baby when she fell into the river on that summer evening, and that now she was a maid of seven, learning to read and sew in the village school, and that by her added years she must count those that she herself had lived through.

The dinner hour was rather a terrible ordeal to look forward to under the circumstances. Sydney wished it well over many a time, as she dressed. It was difficult to talk as if nothing had happened, and yet it must be.

'He will soon forget. He will go away to-morrow, and when next we meet——'

She did not complete her sentence. Her thoughts drifted away to her own life, her own future.

'It would not be fair to anyone,' she said, looking at her sad eyes in the glass. 'I could not help fretting, it would not be right.'

The dinner was not as uncomfortable as she had feared might be the case.

Mr. Loraine had done a good afternoon's work, and was full of his book, and some drawings Mr. Carteret had done for him, and he himself appeared to talk as lightly and easily as usual. No one seemed to notice Sydney's silence. Her black lace dress made her look very pale, and there were dark shadows under her eyes which even the brightness of the diamond stars in her hair and throat did not quite counteract.

'Men's hearts do not break so easily,' she thought bitterly, as she listened to the steady flow of talk. 'They think it hurts for a little while, and then they go away—and forget.'

The words, the train of thought they engendered, caused her such a pang that she shivered as if in actual pain.

'You caught cold this afternoon,' Mr. Carteret said, turning his head directly towards her. 'I feared you would.'

'No, no,' recalling her straying thoughts, 'I never catch cold.'

'Don't boast.'

He resumed his conversation at once with Mr. Loraine, and her mind was not recalled to the present talk again until she heard him say something that attracted her attention. Of what came before she was unaware,—what caught her ears were the words 'When I was in Pomerania.' She leant forward suddenly, a question in her eyes and on her lips, but what it was remained unasked. Mr. Carteret, watching her, paused in his sentence, wondering what it was in his light adventures that had attracted such vivid, though momentary, interest. Losing the thread of his story in his conjectures, he did not again refer to Germany, and a few minutes later she left the dining-room.

But only to wait, in feverish impatience, until he should follow her.

It was so extremely unlikely, but still every chance, however faint, was worth trying.

And what did she want to know? Long, long ago, was over and buried the faintest possibility of any happy future accruing to her from the knowledge of the life he was leading.

'But I should like to know,' wistfully. 'I should always like to know.' Her thoughts had pictured him so often with the blonde German girl, grown matronly and tender, teaching him year by year to return the love that shone in her honest eyes—had pictured him sometimes with little children about his knees; little children with frank blue eyes, and corn-coloured hair, who were added links in the chain that bound him to their mother.

'I should like to know,' she thought wearily, and then the door opened, and Mr. Carteret entered the room, before she had time to banish the softness from her eyes that the thought of the past had brought there.

'Tell me,' he said at once, without any preface, 'what did you want to ask me at dinner?'

'You said'—hesitatingly. Then, lifting her eyes steadily, 'you said you had been in Pomerania—where were you—when was it?'

'It was—let me see, two, three, four, nearly five years ago. I went for a very sad reason: to tell an old man, whom I had never seen, about the death of his son. I was staying at a small inn for a couple of nights. The son was there, very ill—he was on his way home. I stayed with him till he died, which he did the next day, before any of his people could be sent for, and afterwards—'

Afterwards!

Ah, what more was there to hear! No need for any name even—she knew it all now.

Out of her cheeks and lips the colour slowly ebbed as she watched him; only her eyes, wide and painful with unshed tears, looking into his, seemed to compel him to go on; but when he reached that word, which seemed to shut out hope and life, she staggered back, and would have fallen but for his steady hands.

‘He is dead,’ she cried, but very low, sinking down on to the broad window-seat, but she did not let go the hands that held hers; she seemed to cling to them, as if for comfort and support.

‘He died, poor child! years ago. Why, did you not know it?’

Of a sudden he seemed to understand so much; seemed to feel such pity for the trembling, despairing woman by whose side he knelt, as to preclude all idea of love, except as comprised in tenderness.

‘He was to come back,’ she said, ‘or write.’

‘And you did not hear?’

‘Nothing, nothing,’ with a despairing sob; ‘I have waited.’

She did not cry, she had wept all her tears years ago. They had been wept over his grave—there was a feeling of peacefulness almost in the thought.

‘Tell me more,’ she said at length. There was unreality in Roy Carteret’s presence; he was not the man whose love-making only that very afternoon had troubled her, but a kind friend who had a warm human heart, and who sympathised with her in her loneliness and despair.

There was so little to tell; but he told it all, kneeling by her side, whilst the wind blew in at the open window, and her eyes looked abroad to the stormy sky above, or to the wind-tossed trees below.

‘He was never quite conscious from the first moment that I saw him. I sat up with him that last night,—but he did not speak, and in the morning he died. His brother came next day, and at his wish I went on to his home, and saw his father, and told him all I could. But you see it was not much.’

No, it was not much. And all the rest was buried in the grave of fair-haired Esmé von Lindenheim.

For a little while after Mr. Carteret had finished speaking she remained silent, and then rose up.

‘Thank you,’ she said softly—could he ever have thought her eyes cold and hard?—‘you have been very kind. I think you

might tell father ; he was very fond of him, and at first sometimes wondered—Ah ! ' her voice breaking,—‘it has been such pain, such terrible pain ! ’

He felt he could hardly trust his own voice to say much.

‘Good night,’ he said,—‘or good-bye, if you are not down early.’

‘Good-bye,’ she repeated, almost mechanically, and turned away.

But even in her own room she did not weep much.

A few tears fell as she unlocked, and took from a case that she had not opened for years, a small framed miniature of a fair-haired man, with blue eyes that looked somewhat sadly into hers. It was the only relic she possessed of that buried time, and her eyes grew dim as she looked upon it. All the tears she had shed had been upon his grave, for long years he had been at rest. He had been saved the battle, the burden had all fallen to her share. ‘And I was strong, and have borne it,’ she thought. ‘He has been saved so much, and as it had to be, I am glad—yes, I *think* I am glad, that *she* never knew. It is I who have borne it all ! ’ And she looked into the mirror at the grey hairs and the saddened eyes that were the price she had paid. ‘And, after all, I have been to blame. I did not trust you as I promised I would. You said if you lived you would come back. It seems as if I never remembered that until to-night. But I told you once,’ she murmured, with hands clasped, ‘that whatever happened, I would never grudge the price, and I do not—even now, even now ! ’

The storm blew itself out in the night, and a bright May sun shone out in the morning, to throw a little cheerfulness over Mr. Carteret’s departure.

He had wandered about the garden, had admired the peacocks so palpably standing to be admired, hoping that he should see Sydney Loraine before he left.

He fancied that he would like to judge for himself what was the result of the storm ; if there were anything else he could do, or tell her, that might prove of comfort.

No shadow of selfishness mingled with his thoughts.

The sorrow he had seen in her eyes, had heard in her voice, seemed in a way to have purified his love into something so tender, that all that remained of it was a wish to show his sympathy.

But she did not appear.

‘So best,’ he thought with a sigh. ‘There is, after all, nothing I can say.’

His ‘Good-bye’ said to Mr. Loraine, he went into the library to fetch a book,—it would not be so very long now before he must find his way to the station. But he had only been alone in the room a few minutes when the door opened, and she came in.

She appeared taller than usual in the long white morning dress; no colour anywhere, and his heart ached when he saw her.

‘You do not look fit to be walking about,’ he said kindly, taking her hand in his. ‘I hoped that you were resting.’

‘No,’ she said, ‘I wanted to see you. I could not let you go without saying good-bye, and thanking you——’ her voice drifted away into a sort of dreary echo of its usual tones.

‘You were so kind,’ she began again. And then, altering to a fresh sentence, ‘Are you going to-day?’

‘Yes,’ he answered; ‘don’t worry about me.’

He had dropped her hand, and when he had so spoken, he turned to the window, and stood looking out over the garden, where the gleams of sunshine were making a promise of coming brightness.

‘Why do you go?’ she asked; ‘you know father likes you being here,—you,’ hesitatingly, ‘were going to stay longer than this.’

‘It is better,’ he answered.

He did not turn his head as he spoke. ‘Your father is coming up to town in a fortnight, and I will see him then.’

She did not answer, but remained still for a moment, looking at him, as if wondering what to say next,—and then, with a few steps, she stood beside him, and he knew she was speaking again, her voice very soft and low.

‘Please do not go—’ Her voice was so unsteady, that he could scarcely catch the words, and he turned his head, and looked down at her where she stood beside him, her hand resting on his arm. ‘I think,’ she began falteringly, ‘that it is *I* who wish you to stay—you know everything, will you stay now? I think I want some one to take care of me.’



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